

THE  
EASTERN  
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Editor: DON LEE WILSON

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VIRGIN MARY

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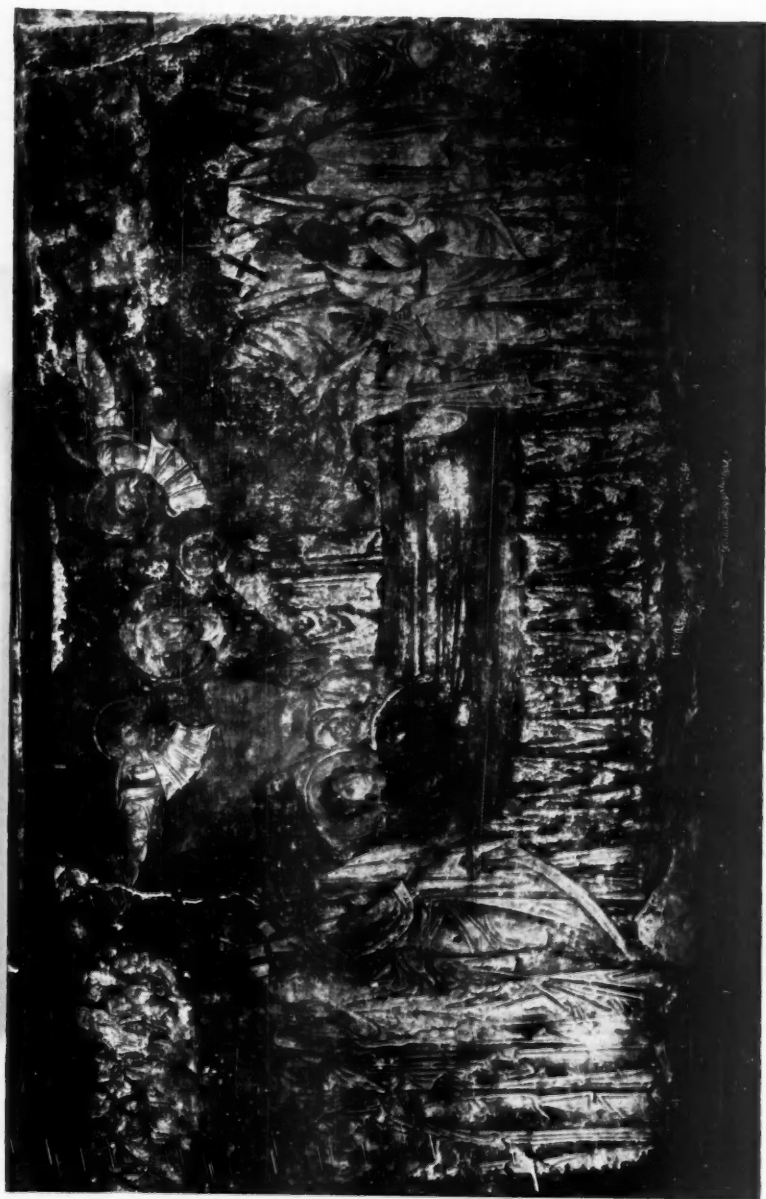
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# THE EASTERN CHURCHES QUARTERLY

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## THE DOCTRINE OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

**I**N our last issue, the first to come out since the definition, we referred to the Church's teaching on the bodily Assumption by quoting some apposite verses from the Byzantine Liturgy. In previous issues of the *E.C.Q.* articles have appeared concerning this doctrine:—in the July-September number for 1947, Dom Thomas Rigby stressed the point that the Assumption was an article of divine and Catholic Faith *ex Magisterio Ordinario*; in two issues in 1949 (July-September and October-December), Mr Archdale King set forth the tradition from the Oriental Liturgies.

In the present issue we are considering further the tradition of the Eastern Churches and specially their tradition in regard to art.

Ecclesiastical art in the East has never lost its close association with worship and doctrine. It has not sunk to the mere level of decoration as so often in the West, hence it can be considered as a real part of the liturgical tradition of the Church. The tradition bears witness to the oneness of the teaching concerning the doctrine of the Assumption as held both by the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches.

In the Byzantine scheme of decorations, to quote Otto Demus, 'historical cycles and subjects from the Old and the New Testaments, or from the apocryphal and legendary writings, are inserted in this hierarchical system not so much for their independent narrative value as for their importance as testimonies to the truth of the central dogma'.

It is for this reason that we include the article of the Coptic bishop of Assiut with its wealth of legend. Here too we see the link between the Coptic and Serbian traditions and the West.

In order the better to appreciate this tradition of the East it is helpful to have the following salient passages from the Bull of Pope Pius XII before us. 'From all eternity, the Blessed Virgin has been the object of God's unique, loving, regard ; and when at last the appointed time came, his Providence saw to it that all the gifts and graces freely bestowed on her should be characterized by a kind of inner coherence. It is the inner coherence of these graces that the Church has been studying more and more all down the centuries, and it has been left for our own age to see in a clearer light than before one particular privilege conferred on the Mother of God—her bodily Assumption into heaven. And now, whereas the Universal Church, with the spirit of Truth strong in her, that brings her even to more perfect knowledge of revealed doctrines, has manifested her faith upon many occasions as the centuries went by ; and whereas the bishops of the world have asked, with a consent almost universal, that the doctrine of our Lady's bodily Assumption into heaven should be defined ; and whereas the said doctrine is grounded upon scripture, is deeply implanted in the minds of the faithful, is attested by the immemorial practice of the Church, is fully in harmony with other revealed truths, and has been lucidly set forth by the learned labours of theology ; we believe that the moment has come, in accordance with the designs of Providence, to pronounce solemnly on this signal privilege which the Blessed Virgin enjoys (namely) that the immaculate ever-virgin Mother of God, her earthly life ended, was taken up, body and soul of her, into the glory of heaven' (*Munificentissimus Deus*).

## THE ASSUMPTION IN THE LITURGY OF THE CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA

**T**HE Holy Mother who is so much exalted in our liturgy, which proclaims the prerogatives of her divine maternity, could not be overcome for ever by death. That is why the Coptic Church, if it celebrates the feast of the Dormition of Mary on the 21st Tobi (January), and honours her sepulchre at Gethsemane, also sings the glory of the translation of her body, borne by angels, on the feast of the 16th Mesori (August).

May I be allowed to cite the legends which are read on these days in the presence of the people, who retain a simple and strong faith. One must remark that the oriental, this child of the sun and the exuberance of light, is always attracted and charmed by the marvellous. His mentality hardly loves metaphysic; rationalism can have no power over him.

*Legends*: I cite the two versions found in the Coptic books (Mimar).

'When Mary was about to leave the earth, God caused the Apostles to come to her, borne on the clouds. They found themselves by her bed. Suddenly our Lord, surrounded by myriads of Angels singing the heavenly songs, was in the midst of them. He came to bear the soul of His Mother to heaven. It was the 21st Tobi. With deep reverence the Apostles placed her remains in a new sepulchre in the Garden of Gethsemane, and they remained there watching and praying till the moment when they saw her body come gloriously from the tomb, borne by angels, praising, giving glory and singing. At the news of Mary's death the Jews set out for Gethsemane with the object of seizing the body of Mary and burning it. But when they opened the sepulchre they only saw perfumed incense rising. A great multitude believed, while their wise men went back put to confusion. This event took place the 16th Mesori in the year of her Dormition, that is 5545 after Adam . . . Three days after her burial the Apostles wished to open the tomb. In fact Thomas the Apostle had been absent from the burial and held that he would be blessed by touching the body of Mary. But they found only flowers with a sweet perfume. As to the body, it was carried to heaven. It is this that St John Damascene relates, according to a tradition that had come down to him.'

The Mimar of the Assumption as it is read at the present day is this:

'St Thomas had not arrived in time to assist at the burial of the Mother of God, but while he himself was borne on a cloud near the Mount of Olives, he saw the body of Mary carried in the air. So he asked the Angels for an explanation. They acquainted him with the death of the Virgin and told him that the Lord had ordained that her body should be borne and raised up into Paradise. He rejoices at it, and having prostrated, he kisses the body and blesses it, and then he continues his journey, borne by the cloud to Gethsemane. There he meets his brethren and greets them, but they reproach him with his absence at the Falling Asleep of the Virgin Mary, making him understand that if he had been present he would have witnessed wonderful happenings in her last moments. "I know it all", he says, "As I was delayed by the baptism of Claudis, daughter of the king of the Indies, the Holy Spirit has revealed everything to me. This does not prevent me wanting to see her body." And so, by this request, he conceals from them the vision with which he has been favoured. "We have placed it at the bottom of the grotto, and it is difficult for us to roll away the stone which closes the entrance." "If it be so I cannot bring myself to believe you, for I must see with my own eyes." "How you always doubt. Have you forgotten the lesson you received at the Resurrection?" Then all together with a united effort they roll away the stone and enter the sepulchre, but they find it empty. Not knowing what to say they look at one another. Thomas then, in his turn, reveals to them his joyful encounter. They believe him and eagerly betake themselves to the Mount of Olives. As soon as they arrive they begin to pray, offering incense, and imploring the Lord to show them the place where the body of the Virgin is to be found. Immediately a cloud descends from heaven, ravishes the Apostles and bears them into paradise. Then they can gaze upon the Lord Jesus, the living God, who receives the praises of the angels, and has His Mother near Him. Jesus says: "Look, my Mother, at this great kingdom and these thousands of powers which serve Thee, and bless these". Mary looks and rejoices in it. She sees Enoch, Moses, Elias, the Fathers, the Prophets, the chosen Apostles. All prostrate themselves before the Lord God and proclaim Mary blessed. The Angels conduct her through the twelve heavens. . . When they arrive at the last her Son reveals to her the secrets of the future and shows to her the place of torment reserved for the unbelievers. She is then taken to the place where the tree of life is found. The Lord says to the Angels: "Lay her

down in the shade of this tree of life, mark her body with the Cross. There it will remain until the day of resurrection." Everyone is lost in admiration, and is amazed when they see the Lord approach the body of His Mother, kiss it and give it the pax in these words: "Hail, O body, which was My dwelling during nine months, so as to allow Me to make man anew. Hail O body, more beautiful than heaven and earth, thou hast been Mine Ark of the Covenant until the day when I saved Adam. Rest now on this virgin earth under the shade of the tree of life, and remain thus until the day of the resurrection."

It appears from the quotation that for the Copts the Assumption is a translation of a lifeless body, or again a resurrection followed by a sleep which will last till the end of time. In any case the belief has not the appearance of being clear, in spite of all that it contains of the marvellous.

The Coptic authors attribute the legend to St John the Evangelist. Meanwhile there is room to believe that it is apocryphal and dates from the fourth century. In effect the feast of the Assumption, fixed on the 16th Messori, goes back to well before Chalcedon (451), the date of the schism of the Holy Church. The monastic abstinence or fast which precedes it proves that it was established in the time of the Desert Fathers. The feast of the Assumption and its abstinence are so thoroughly embedded in customs and traditions that the Moslems of the country observe it in great number down to the present day. Can one not therefore be sure that it was well established in Christian and family traditions before 632?

Historians aver that this feast was observed in the Universal Church in the second half of the third century. Moreover the first historic documents which attest belief in the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin go back to this epoch.

In the East this feast of the Blessed Virgin was celebrated from the end of the fourth century, more than fifty years before the Council of Ephesus. In the Coptic Church it completes the liturgical cycle and ends the year. Messori is in fact the last month of the Coptic year.

St Methodius of Jerusalem, who died in 634, in giving an account of the Dormition of the Virgin Mother, shows us that the Assumption is a feast anterior to that date. He mentions the regathering of the Apostles, come from afar to be with the Blessed Virgin, and that by a way known to God alone: *Os monos epistatai Theos*. He speaks of the apparition of Christ who comes Himself to His Mother, the ardour with which

<sup>1</sup> 632 Moslem invasion of Egypt (Translator).

soul, separated from her body, takes its flight towards her divine Son, then her immediate return to life, and finally her corporal participation in the eternal incorruption of Him who had caused her to come forth from the tomb and who had drawn her to Himself in a manner that only He could know.

St Epiphane in the fourth century alludes to the Assumption, and asks if Mary had ever passed through death, a question which implies the unanimous sentiment of Christians, that the body of the Virgin did not undergo the corruption of the tomb.

From the tenth century onwards this pious belief was everywhere accepted in the East just as much as in the West. The pure flesh of Mary is the flesh which the Redeemer has sacrificed on the cross to destroy death and sin. Should this flesh of Mary be submitted to the lot of all flesh, although it is the proximate instrument of our redemption, or should it immediately receive the reward of the redemption? It is certainly around the second opinion that Christian belief crystallized itself. For the Assumption as for the Immaculate Conception, it is a case of the antecedent application of the merits of our Lord, the Redeemer of mankind. It is the mystery of Infinite Love which has chosen the Virgin as co-redemptrix and accorded Her the prerogatives of the Redemption. *Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est.*

Here is the doctrine of the Assumption: we affirm that this resurrection of the flesh which for us will take place only at the end of the world, took place for Mary not long after her death, so that, like Jesus, the Virgin enjoys, from that time until now, the recompense which will be, at some future time, the recompense of all the just.

Here are some texts drawn from the Coptic liturgy which seem to suggest the same doctrine:

Psalmody of 21 Tobi, feast of the Dormition: 'Then speedily She gave back Her soul to Him. The Apostles carry her body. At Gethsemane where it is placed without delay they remain to guard it until the Assumption.' 'Merciful God has raised it mercifully to paradise.'

In the Psalmody of 16 Hator, on the feast of the dedication of the church of the Virgin at Deir-el-Moharrak, we find these words: 'For her sake He has, through His bounty, caused death to cease'. 'By His bounty the immortal (*enathmon*) Virgin Mary has merited blessings.' This word *nathmon* shows that She is living, a tree of life, a new Eve. How can she be the new Eve if She has been a prey to death? She who has triumphed

over sin and has been made free from all sin could not undergo the consequences of sin, that is to say, death. The stainless Virgin, in her virginal flesh could not be stained by the destruction of death.

The idea of Mary's Assumption is then a tradition current among the Egyptians, although it is confused by imagination and enwrapped by legends. Thus, in spite of frequently affirming a translation, there are noticeable differences and certain things which are hardly clear about the state of the body of the Blessed Virgin. They appear to question whether it was really brought to life, or whether it was carried to heaven lifeless. And then it is not even heaven, but the earthly paradise, still conserved—where? how? Imagination plays a great role, and the marvellous causes confusion.

I shall allow myself to quote the following Invitatory which seems to retain two different conceptions and two traditions. The clarity of the first part is more or less obscured by the second, as one can prove by what follows:

Invitatory of the feast of the Assumption, 16 Mesori,  
Paraphrase:

"Hasten to-day all you faithful people to greet this Virgin, the Mother of God, Holy Mary. She has shown us at one time the holy Resurrection and Ascension, by the burial of her body and its ascension into heaven. Adam, the first father, is there, with all the other Patriarchs, all the Prophets, the Apostles, the squadrons of the just, the celestial hierarchy, and Jesus her Spouse. They surround Mary, the Mother of God. The Saviour speaks to her, saying: "Arise, O Mary, for I shall make Thee rise with Me to the heavens and be welcomed with Me above. Arise and come with Me this day, O daughter of Joachim and Anna. Be quickened from among the dead, and so enter into paradise. Arise and come with Me this day, O holy Spouse, I have dwelt in Thy womb nine months. Arise and come with Me, O sun of justice, who hast risen upon mankind and enlightened all men. Arise and come with Me this day, O temple of virgins, that I have chosen, and in whom I have remained to save Mine image. Arise and come with Me this day, O tabernacle not made with hands, for I would make Thee mount to the heavens and present Thee as the guest of My father." At this moment the Virgin Mother of God, Mary, is raised up and receives resurrection, according to the command of her Son.

Thou art beautiful, My well-beloved, O Mary, Mother of God. Our souls rejoice at Thy resurrection from among the

dead. Thou art beautiful, O My well beloved, Thou the Virgin pure without stain, by Thy mediation mankind has been saved.

With a loud voice the Redeemer, our Master Jesus Christ commands all the Saints to remain standing in her presence, saying, "Come all ye just, prostrate yourselves before my Mother, whose glory the Prophets sing. Come and prostrate yourselves before my Mother, O ye holy Apostles. She has been a Mother to you, and your heart's comforter. Come and prostrate yourselves before my Mother, O ye Martyrs and Saints, She has sustained you until the accomplishment of your struggle and trial."

The following part seems to be by another hand and to belong to another tradition: 'O all ye daughters of Israel, dwellers in Juda, attached to the holy service of the temple, come on this day and run to the Mount of Olives with all the virgins. There you will find the Mother of purity. Among the Disciples and Apostles the Virgin is laid upon her bed covered with her mantle. Hasten for a burial worthy of her honour.' The women weep and lament over their Mother, their Queen, their Model, the Mother of God, Mary. When the Jews, incredulous and full of hate, hear the cries, the noise and the weeping of the crowd, they ask the cause of all this hubbub which has disturbed the town and terrified the inhabitants. Somebody then says: 'The daughter of Joachim, the Mother of Jesus of Nazareth has died at the cenacle on Sion and they go to take her to Gethsemane. Immediately the Jews consult together and in their great ignorance decide to burn the body of the Mother of God, St Mary. But the angel of the Lord taking a sword, throws to the ground all these mischievous men. The Apostles take the body, carry it to the tomb, and weep over it for a long time with prolonged lamentations. On the 16th of the month, Messori, the Saviour descends from heaven, surrounded by celestial armies of all the spirits, the just, the saints, the martyrs. They raise up the body and rise to the heavens and place it beneath the tree of life in the midst of paradise. We beseech Thee, O holy Virgin, intercede for us with Thy well-beloved Son, that he may grant us the pardon of our sins.'

Here is another paraphrase for the 16th Messori: 'David the Prophet, the King of Israel, has sung the glory of Mary in his psalms, saying, "The Queen is raised up to the right-hand of the King, clothed in gold". She is raised up to the right-hand of her Son after her Falling Asleep. She intercedes for the remission of our sins. O John, the chaste and the evangelist,

come amongst us this day to teach us about the Dormition and Ascension of the Mother of God to the heavens. The Apostle says: "When the moment of death of the Mother of God comes near, before her body should be raised up, She calls the Apostles and all the virgins to the Mount of Olives. When they are gathered together around her, She consoles them and begs them to preserve their chastity. The Word of God descends from the height of heaven in honour of His Mother, and it is into her Son's hands that She renders her soul. He presents her as the guest of his Father. The Apostles carry away her body and lay it in the valley of Josaphat. They remain there from the 21st Tobi to the 16th Messori, the day of her Ascension. It is then that the Saviour comes and takes it. The body is borne above to the heavens. All the Apostles see the Virgin seated at the right-hand of her Son in immense glory and honour. Thus is accomplished the prophecy of David the King, saying, "The Queen is raised up to the right-hand of the King". By the intercession of Mary the Virgin, may God pardon our sins, the sins of our fathers according to the flesh and the spirit, and those of all faithful Christians. Alleluia.'

Mary has not only her place in the liturgy, but her temples scattered throughout Egypt. It is certainly true that She is the *Theotokos*, but also She is our Lady of the Assumption. Thus following the Arab historian surnamed El-Makrizi<sup>1</sup> in his book *El-Khittat wa El-Assar*—which is a history of ancient Egypt treated down to the Copts—we can say that of many of the numerous churches which still existed from his time (eighth century) there were in the fourteenth century twenty-two sanctuaries dedicated to Mary in Upper Egypt and seven in Lower Egypt. Of these sanctuaries two are to this day dedicated to our Lady of the Assumption. They are a big centre of pilgrimage and of great Marian celebrations on the 16th Messori, the feast of the Assumption.

(1) The Church or sanctuary of *Haret Zouela*. According to El-Makrizi the word seems to be derived from *Zeilon* which seems to be the philosopher Zeno or the emperor of that name who lived at the end of the fifth century. In fact it was at about this period, according to the historians, that the church was raised and dedicated to the Virgin Mary (see Makrizi, p. 93).

(2) *Deir Dronka* or *Adronka*, according to Makrizi, who reports the following (p. 81) in a special chapter: 'Understand that around the Adronka monastery near Siant in Upper

<sup>1</sup> El-Imam Abou-el Abbas El sheikh taky-el-Dine Ahmed Aly Ebn Abd-el-Kader, surnamed El-Makrizi, born in Cairo in 761 of the Hegirah.

Egypt many Christian villages are to be found. These Jacobite Christians are remarkable for their attachment to the faith, to profound knowledge of their doctrine, and to explanations of their books. They know Coptic and translate it into Arabic easily, and old and young speak it among themselves. Many churches are found in this neighbourhood, and even numerous monasteries and hermitages. Amongst others, at the top of one of these little hills is found the church of Karfonne or Agraphona, which means "the writer". It is dedicated to the Holy Virgin. There a great many copyists live, giving themselves to religious science and the transcription of liturgical books. This church is surrounded by numerous grottos which continue for two days, journey on foot.'

Thus then the Church of the Assumption at Deir Dronka would be the remains of one of these monasteries inhabited by cenobites at the time of the Diocletian persecution in 284. Everything there is in fact hollowed out of the rock, and it might be asked how the religious could reach the grottos which are simply superimposed caves on the flank of an abrupt, denuded, waterless hill, a Calvary.

At the present day one reaches this sanctuary by Assint by means of a practicable way. The sanctuary, which is small enough, ramshackle and badly kept up, is dedicated to the cult of the Blessed Virgin's Assumption. Since about forty years ago, the inhabitants of these grottos, who are all Christians, have formed rather lower down a big village called Deir Dronka. This has nothing of the monastery about it. They have also built a church to St Michael, Egypt's defender. It should be remarked that one part of the sanctuary of the Virgin is hollowed out in the rock itself and simply completed by the present small building. Each year for the Assumption there is a great pilgrimage, people coming from every corner of Egypt to pray and fulfil their vows. At the request of the religious authorities, the government has given a pilgrimage permit and taken charge of good order. The pilgrims spend the time sheltered in the grottos in a confusion scarcely worthy of the cult of the Virgin. However, one cannot deny that these popular devotions are truly touching in their simplicity, and that much confidence in the Blessed Virgin lies hidden in them.

I believe that a people so devoted to the Mother of God will be recalled to the light, in spite of the centuries of separation. I cannot doubt that Mary will unite this Church to the fold of her Son, and obtain resurrection for Egypt according to the prophecy of Isaias.

## Falling Asleep of the Mother of God 101

Our Lady of the Assumption, O Virgin of Assint, remember that by the consecration of the clergy and the faithful, you have become the Queen of the diocese of Lycopolis. Obtain for us, together with perseverance, the grace to triumph over the ferocity of the Wolf of Souls, and to be always the worthy children of Holy Church. It redounds to your honour and your glory. O *Omnipotentia Supplex*, heal the Copts, give them the faith of the martyrs, their ancestors, and lead them all to unity!

AMBA ALEXANDER,  
*Catholic Coptic Bishop of Assint, Upper Egypt.*  
(Translation by E. J. B. FRY)

### THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE FALLING ASLEEP OF THE MOTHER OF GOD IN BYZANTINE TRADITION

**T**HOU didst preserve thy virginity in thy child-bearing, O Mother of God, and in thy Falling Asleep thou didst not abandon the world. Thou hast passed unto life, Thou the Mother of Life, who, by thy intercession, deliverest our souls from death.' Troparion from the office of the Feast, 15th August.

The greatest of the feasts of Our Lady in the Byzantine calendar, and one of the twelve great feasts of the Church year, is Κοίμησις τῆς Παναγίας, the Falling Asleep of the All-Holy Mother of God.<sup>1</sup> The liturgical observance is in fact so solemn that the feast is preceded by a fast of a fortnight and a day of Vigil, and is continued until 23rd August. We propose in this article to examine something of the iconographical traditions connected with this feast, limiting ourselves to the purely Byzantine.<sup>2</sup> Since the iconographic treatment is very much dependant on the liturgical and homilectical development we must first examine briefly that development which will thus aid us in our appreciation of the fully developed Eikon. In view of the very central position occupied by the Mother of God in the Byzantine rite such a study is of great interest.

<sup>1</sup> Many churches were and are dedicated in honour of this feast in Greece and Asia Minor and most cemetery chapels are so dedicated together with the dedication of All Saints.

<sup>2</sup> In particular I do not treat of Serbian iconography though it plays an important role in the development of representations of the Assumption proper. For Slavonic and Coptic traditions see the other articles in this number of *E.C.Q.*, which include a number of illustrations of Serbian representations.

In the fourth century the East knew only one feast of the Virgin, kept at varying dates according to the locality and commemorating the divine maternity.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of the fifth century a Roman lady, Ikélia, founded a church at a place called Kathisma between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, in which some have seen the origin of the feast of the Falling Asleep or Dormition. During the sixth century a whole cycle of feasts of our Lady began to be observed: the Nativity, the Conception of St Anne, the Presentation, the Annunciation.<sup>2</sup> About the year 600, according to Nicephorus Callistos,<sup>3</sup> the Emperor Maurice extended the feast of the Koimesis to the whole Empire, perhaps on the occasion of the reconstruction of the church at Gethsemane on the site of the Virgin's tomb. By about 620 the situation was such that John of Thessalonica could say, 'the feast is celebrated almost everywhere except for certain places',<sup>4</sup> among those certain places being Thessalonica itself. At Rome, where the Gelasian decrees had condemned an apocryphal 'Liber Transitus Mariae', the feast was not finally adopted until under Theodore I (642—649), who had been a member of the Jerusalem clergy. The discourse on the Dormition attributed to St Modestus of Jerusalem (+ 634), but which in fact must be attributed to an anonymous author after the General Council of 681, is firm in its affirmation of the Assumption as indeed are the contemporary theologians—St John Damascene, St Germanos of Constantinople and St Andrew of Crete (with however a slight hesitation).

The great source for the elaboration of the story of the Assumption was the Apocryphas, which began to appear about the end of the fifth century and of which some twenty are known to-day. Here, whereas Syrian accounts tend to represent the resurrection of our Lady, the Greek tradition tends to prefer the transfer and incorruptibility of the body. We may note in passing that the decree defining the dogma carefully excludes from the definition any settlement of this question—the text is worded 'Immaculatam Dieparam semper Virginem

<sup>1</sup> The ancient observance of the feast is attested by the fact that Monophysites, Nestorians and ancient national churches such as the Armenian and Ethiopian include it in their calendars.

<sup>2</sup> It has been suggested that the monophysite bishop James of Saroug (+ 521) composed a hymn for the feast of the Dormition but P. Jugie *La Mort and l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge*, pp. 83–5 rejects that it was in fact composed for the feast and maintains that the hymn implies rather that the body of the Virgin remained on the earth. The state of affairs in the sixth century is best summarized by S. Epiphanius: 'No one knows what was the manner of the earthly end of the Mother of God'.

<sup>3</sup> P.G., CXLVII, col. 292.

<sup>4</sup> P.Or., XIX, p. 376.

## Falling Asleep of the Mother of God 103

Mariam, *expleto terrestri vitae cursu*, fuisse corpore et anima ad coelestem gloriam assumptam', thus leaving open the question as to whether in fact the Blessed Virgin tasted death.

It was however the Syrian account which, translated into Latin, found its way early into the West. It was because of the frivolous nature of many of the accounts that John of Thessalonica developed his theme: 'The apostles left a true and limpid account of the last moments of the Virgin, but the heretics, in their hatred against the Church, have, afterwards, sown there the tares of error', he wrote. His predecessors had refrained from celebrating the feast not from indifference or negligence but precisely because of the absurd legends which were circulating about the death of the Virgin, legends which contained things 'out of keeping with the faith of the Catholic Church' ὡς ἀναρμοδύων τῇ καθολικῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ. John therefore, in establishing the feast at Thessalonica, put forth his account of the events surrounding the death of our Lady.<sup>1</sup> P. Duhr, S.J., in an article in the *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* for February 1950, has brought out the importance of this discourse in the development of the tradition in the east. It was extraordinarily popular there and almost all preachers drew on it for their homilies, so much so that it finally entered the offices in the churches. Dom Bernard Capelle, O.S.B., in a study published in 'Mélanges Paul Peeters',<sup>2</sup> has established that John in fact reproduced a βίβλος τῆς ἀναπαύσεως Μαρίας going back at least to the sixth century. In brief the basic account is as follows:

Our Lady is visited three days before her death by St Michael, who announces her coming death and gives her, as a pledge of divine love a palm which she is to give to the apostles to bear in her funeral procession. Our Lord himself, she is told, will come in person to receive her soul. Our Lady goes to the Mount of Olives where the trees tremble and bend their heads before her. The day following she unites her friends and relations, who are to assist her with lighted candles. John arrives and Mary charges him with her burial, shows him the palm and the special robe she is to wear after her death. The other apostles arrive on clouds and spend the day with her. At sunrise, on the third day, whilst she is surrounded by the apostles and three virgins, there is a most sweet perfume in the room, a crack as of thunder and the Lord comes in glory

<sup>1</sup> The text is reproduced in *Patrologia Orientalis*, t. XIX, pp. 344-438, and preserves nevertheless much which is fantastic.

<sup>2</sup> t. I, pp. 21-48. 'Vestiges grecs et latins d'un antique "Transitus" de la Vierge.'

on the clouds with his angels. He enters the room with Michael and Gabriel, embraces his apostles and our Lady who thanks him: 'Who am I to receive such an honour and such glory?' and when Our Lady yields up her soul to our Lord he passes it to St Michael. The soul is described as in 'the form of a human body, complete with all its members but without sex . . . it was white, seven times more dazzling than the sun'. The account continues with the burial. The apostles carrying the bier go to Gethsemane, Peter intoning the 'In exitu Israel de Aegypto'. Angels fill the air with heavenly music which is heard by the high priests who come to kill the apostles and burn the body of the Virgin. The angels strike them with blindness except one who succeeds in reaching the bier. His hands remain fixed to the bier and come off from his arms. Peter shows him that he must believe in Christ. He is converted and for three hours blesses the name of Mary and to the admiration of the apostles cites several texts from the Pentateuch in her honour. Peter then makes him approach his arms to the hands still fastened to the bier, and they are miraculously rejoined. He is given the palm and told to preach to his fellows. Those who believe receive their sight.

The manuscripts of John of Thessalonica end variously; P. Jugie in his edition in the *Patrologia Orientalis* says that for fifteen manuscripts there are eleven different endings. All the variations of the account of the Assumption are to be found and five of them make no mention at all of the bodily Assumption of the Mother of God.<sup>1</sup> The versions which P. Jugie accepts as the oldest authentic, Vat. 2072—says that the apostles remained three days at the tomb of our Lady; they then opened the tomb in order to venerate the body to find only the shroud because Jesus had carried the body away to its eternal resting place. P. Jugie comments that there seems to be here a reference to the Assumption proper though it is not very explicit, and points out that though the Byzantine tradition by far the more

<sup>1</sup> Vat. 2013 gives the three days at the tomb but omits all mention of the Assumption.

Vat. 1608 does not even mention the three days.

Cromw. 1: the Apostles stay to watch the tomb but nothing more.

Coisl. 121: gives the translation of the body.

Marc. VII, 38: Thomas arrives too late, so the tomb is opened for his benefit.

It is found empty; conclusion—the body is in paradise. P. Jugie bases his acceptance of Vat. 2072 as authentic on the ground that it continues the narrative in the first person. On the other hand it would seem to be easier to add variously to an originally sober text than that the text should have been pruned so diversely.

common taught the Resurrection of our Lady, there was another formulated in the Greek apocryphal 'Book of John on the Dormition of Mary'. According to this tradition the body of the Virgin was carried away to the earthly paradise, to be preserved there incorruptible until the day of the general Resurrection. In the tenth century it was still possible for John the Geometer to defend this position and in the eleventh Michael Glykas still found cause to attack it. That the Byzantine tradition was at first hesitant is clear from the very significant fact that the Akathistos hymn, the Byzantine's favourite devotion to the Panaghias dating from perhaps the seventh century has no reference to the Assumption. Occasional troparia in the office witness to this second tradition and are still retained (cf. the opening Kathisma at the Orthros of the Vigil, corrected in the 1904, Athens edition).

The legends vary over the nature of the remains found by the apostles, some speak only of the opening of a tomb and nothing being found inside, others speak of a coffin (σφοδόν) with the ἐντάφια or ταμνάτια of our Lady inside—this last version almost certainly to explain the existence of these relics at Constantinople. The story of the absence of St Thomas and his consequent doubting and of our Lady's appearance to him entered late into the tradition with the Euthymiac history—an apocrypha of the ninth century; the bestowal of her girdle on him later still in the early thirteenth century. The girdle (also claimed by Constantinople) was preserved with great honour at Prato in Italy. It was said to have been brought by a young man Michael dei Dagomari in 1141 from Jerusalem after the first crusade. He had found it in the house of a Greek priest whose daughter he had sought in marriage.

Another important source for the tradition of the feast was the second homily of St John Damascene<sup>1</sup> on the Dormition though coll. 748 A—752 B are an Euthymiac interpolation. In the west on the other hand progress was much slower and a letter falsely attributed to St Jerome could still find credence for its attack on the belief in the eighth century. The effect of unbalanced apocryphas was still being felt. However the solid foundation of the belief of such authors as St John Damascene was theological (drawing from reasons of convenientia, etc.) and not the apocryphas, even at their best, which must be considered as the poetical flowering of this solid basis. For the Eastern fathers the fact of the Assumption enters into a whole scheme of beliefs concerning the Theotokos into which

<sup>1</sup> P.G., XCVI, 699-762 and 1363.

it fits harmoniously and necessarily.<sup>1</sup> We would refer the reader to P. Jugie's *La Mort and l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge* (Rome 1944) where he has collected a valuable series of patristic references showing that the belief in the Assumption was quite independent of the apocryphal accounts which grew up.<sup>2</sup>

The representation of the Koimesis in art mirrors the liturgical and homilectical progress. In the early Byzantine iconographical cycle it seems that the Dormition did not figure,<sup>3</sup> but the theme appears during the classical period (ninth to the twelfth centuries) when the feast entered among the twelve principal feasts of the year. It was during this period that the cycle of the Life of the Virgin began to be treated, a theme which drew inevitably and largely from the apocryphal gospels. The process had, however, begun even before the classical period for, after the destruction of Jerusalem in 614 and as a result of the rebuilding by Modestus, Andrew of Crete alludes to a representation of the Dormition there in the Sion church,<sup>4</sup> and this would seem to have been reproduced in a MS. of St Bede's—the form very simple: the Virgin lying dead with an angel behind her. In the tenth century it is related that Moses of Nisibe introduced a fresco of the Koimesis in the church of his Scete convent. We are still dealing only with representations of the Dormition (and therefore excluding any representation of the Assumption proper) and examples appear at Qouchlouq (Qeledjlar) in Cappadocia in the tenth or eleventh century, in the 'New Church' at Togali-Kilissé, which has been dated as early as the ninth or tenth century, at Daphni in the eleventh century, at La Martorana in Sicily (1120).<sup>5</sup> About 1080 the Monte Cassino manuscript H.H. 98

<sup>1</sup> See also Joseph the Hymnographer (P.G., CV, 999–1004), St Theodore Stoudion (P.G. IC, 719–30), St Modestus (P.G., XCVIII, 357; LXXXVI, 2, 3308), St Andrew of Crete (P.G., XCVII, 1060).

<sup>2</sup> See also his *La Mort et l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge*, Rome, 1944 and Balic, *Testimonia de Assumptione B.V.M.* Pars I. Rome, 1948.

<sup>3</sup> Kunstle maintains on the contrary that the Dormition was represented but that such representations were exterminated with particular fury by the Iconoclasts.

<sup>4</sup> P.G., XCVII, col. 1063.

<sup>5</sup> Like all those at Daphni a beautiful mosaic, but unfortunately in a damaged condition. The Christ is missing. The Virgin (also damaged) is on her bed with six apostles at her feet and two at her head. One (St Peter) censes at her head. On the faces of the apostles an expression of consternation. Two bishops (probably SS. James and Dionysius), and two angels descending with veiled hands.

La Capella Martorana (twelfth century). The apostles are ranged in two groups. John bends over the body. Peter censes. Christ holds the soul high for the angels who descend with veiled hands to take. Two women appear and three bishops (Dionysius, Timothy, Hierothius). A mosaic of extraordinary strength of line, pervaded by a sense of sorrow, of dignity and restraint.

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bears a Dormition, as does an ivory plaque in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

By the eleventh century the composition was fairly stable and we may therefore describe the 'type' of Byzantine representations of the Dormition. In the centre of the Eikon the bed of the Virgin forms the horizontal line; she lies with her feet usually to the right<sup>1</sup> with a group of apostles at either end of the bed. On the left Peter censes the body. On the far side of the bed an old man (the apostle John) bends towards the left shoulder of the Virgin. At the centre Christ stands with the soul of the Virgin in his hands, the soul represented as a baby in swaddling clothes. Two angels descend with veiled hands to receive the soul. There is usually some architectural feature in the background to represent the houses of the Virgin. In the more ancient versions the Virgin lies with her head only raised on a cushion, her eyes closed, she is already dead. Her arms lie usually along the body though occasionally the right arm lies on her breast. On the contrary at Iviron (Mt Athos) and at Qouchlouq the body is half raised and the eyes are open—she is still alive and John in fact bends down to hear what she is saying.

The Christ stands with his body threequarters right with his head turned left. In the Kahrie-Djami mosaic<sup>2</sup> he is very strikingly the only person who looks at the beholder—a significant position in Byzantine art with its underlying assumption of a dialogue between the person portrayed and the beholder. Our Lord passes the soul of the Virgin to Michael and some of the representations have expressed very well the sense of movement (cf. the Victoria and Albert ivory where the end of his himation is flowing out). In the Victoria and Albert ivory in fact the angel descends on the left and is also represented as going up on the right with the soul.

Certain bishops are frequently represented (at Daphni there are two, at the Mt Athos Laura there are four) and their identification has caused some discussion. A passage in the *De Divinis Nominibus* of the Pseudo-Dionysius :<sup>3</sup> 'We were met together to see the flesh which is the source of life and which received God. There was also present James the brother of the Lord,

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, even very anciently, as at Qeledjar, she lies right to left.

<sup>2</sup> One of the loveliest of Byzantine mosaics and one of the most recently discovered. Dates from the fourteenth century. It was not made for its present position in the church at Kahrie-Djami and is of such exquisite workmanship that it is estimated that it took some fifteen years to complete.

<sup>3</sup> P.G., III, 681

and Peter most eminent of theologians', was taken by St Andrew of Crete (+ 740) as a reference to the Dormition. In that case the bishops to be represented would be James, Hierothius (of whom the Pseudo-Dionysius is speaking), Timothy and Dionysius himself. At Daphni we may suppose the two bishops to be James and Dionysius.

The arrival of the apostles on clouds appears first at Ocrida (St Sophia) in the eleventh century though, if we accept P. Jerphanion's early date of tenth century for the 'New Church' at Toquale-Kilissé, they are already represented there. According to the homily of St John Damascene all the apostles came on clouds (St John from Ephesus and St Peter from Rome where he was on his way to Matins) but, according to the homily of John of Thessalonica, John was already at Jerusalem and only eleven came on clouds. These variations are consequently found reflected in the eikons.

One element which appears even in the oldest representations and which has received no satisfactory explanation is a footstool in front of the bed sometimes with and sometimes without a box or book on it. Curiously, in view of the stress which John of Thessalonica places on the palm in his account, in the Eikons it is frequently absent. In the twelfth century appeared a tendency to add to the assistants; candlesticks appear (following the recital of John of Thessalonica) and a shining aureole surrounds the Christ similar to that of his Transfiguration.<sup>1</sup> The Christ too tends to move away from the centre towards the head of the bed, holds the soul lower and becomes more static.<sup>2</sup>

In the first half of the thirteenth century the translation of the body and the incident with Jephonias make their appearance (first at Souzdal) though a Greek gospel in the Ambrosiana (D. 67 Sup.) links the incident with the death and not the funeral. The story, in general, goes that as the apostles were carrying the body in procession to its burial place, the Jews came to create a disturbance and that when one Jephonias dared to touch the bier his hands were cut off by an angel and remained attached to the bier until he was later healed by the power of the Virgin, converted and became zealous in the defence of the faith against the Jews.

So, as the text of the apocryphas changed, as the artist had now this and now that apocrypha in his hands, so the Eikons bore this or that modification. In the fourteenth century the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Harley Gospel 1810 in the British Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Pala d'Oro at St Mark's, Venice.

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various Latin apocryphas which has been spread in the West began to move East—in the Balkan peninsula and Russia.<sup>1</sup> In turn the Byzantine artists began to copy elements found in Western art. Whereas the Byzantine painters of the tenth and eleventh centuries had in general represented the moment following death and the passing of the soul to the angels, the Western artists had portrayed rather the moment when our Lord received the soul. This difference arrived in the East in the fourteenth century and with it the western practice of representing the actual Assumption.<sup>2</sup> A typical example occurs at Peribleptos (Mistra), where there is a large Dormition-Assumption on the end wall of the north transept (not the usual position, see below). The scene of the Falling Asleep is traditional, portrayed with the humanism and agitation which is an element of late Byzantine art. (It dates from the second half of the fourteenth century.) The angel is depicted in the act of cutting off the hands of Jephonias. There are many assistants, three candlesticks. Above, two angels support an almond-shaped aureole with the Virgin enthroned (i.e. and Assumption), in the position of an Orante. Again at Koutloumous (Mt Athos), in a fresco dated 1540, there is a traditional Dormition in the lower section of the fresco and above Our Lady seated in an aureole ascends to heaven with four angels. Or again, at Dochiariou (Mt Athos), 1568, an Assumption where angels open the doors of heaven to receive the ascending Virgin who casts her girdle to St Thomas.

The final conquest is well marked by the Painter's Guide of Mt Athos attributed to Dionysius of Fournà. The French edition published by Didron<sup>3</sup> in the last century is based on manuscript tradition which goes back only to the early eighteenth century, but Dionysius himself lived at the end of the fourteenth century and though the importance of the Guide may have been overestimated, it remains without doubt a valuable witness to tradition. It lays down the forms which the eikons must take and their places in the various picture zones of the church, matters which were strictly controlled by ecclesiastical tradition. (One need only think of the 1658 Golyshev edition of a Russian Painter's Guide: 'He that shall paint an eikon out of his own imagination shall suffer endless

<sup>1</sup> The study of Serbian iconography is very interesting and important.

<sup>2</sup> The earliest known mural representation of the Assumption is at Nagoricino, about 1317. Thomas receives the girdle, the gates of heaven are opened by angels. At Souzdal in Russia occurs the earliest bronze door representation, dating from the early thirteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> *Guide de la Peinture*. Paris 1845.

torment'.) It will therefore be of interest to give the precise iconography as set forth in the guide. (I translate from the French of Didron.)

#### THE DEATH OF THE VIRGIN

A house. In the middle, the Blessed Virgin dead, lying on a bed, hands crossed on the breast. At each side, near the bed, large candlesticks and lighted candles. Before the bed a Jew whose hands, cut off, are attached to the bed and, near him, an angel with a bared sword. At the feet of the Virgin, St Peter censuring her with a censer; at her head, St Paul and St John the Theologian who embrace her. All around, the other apostles and the holy bishops Dionysius the Areopagite, Hierotheus and Timothy carrying gospel books, women weeping. Above, Christ holding in his arms the soul of the Virgin clothed in white; she is surrounded by a great brightness and by a crowd of angels. In the sky one sees besides the twelve apostles coming on clouds. On top of the house at the right, John Damascene holds a scroll with these words 'You merit to be received alive in heaven, O heavenly Virgin, tabernacle divine, etc.' At the left, St Cosmas the poet, holding a scroll inscribed 'You appear to be a mortal woman, but the illustrious apostles see you in reality, O Mother of God, O Immaculate One!'

#### THE BURIAL OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

A tomb. Inside it the Apostle Peter holding the Virgin by the head. Outside it, Paul holds her by the feet. John the Theologian embraces her. The other apostles, all around, carry candles and lament.

#### THE ASSUMPTION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

A tomb empty and open. The apostles in amazement. In the middle of them Thomas, holding the girdle of the Virgin and showing it to them. Above them, in the sky the Virgin carried up to heaven on clouds. Thomas, on the clouds, at the side of the Virgin, receives from her hands a girdle.

The Guide also adds that the picture of this theme in the church (and in fact this is the normal position) is in the 'third zone' . . . at the side of the sunset, above the door of the church, you represent the death of the Mother of God and her other

<sup>1</sup> Of the five which are described in order descending from the (more celestial zones of the) cupola.

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feasts'. With that rich symbolism with which the whole decoration of a Byzantine church is traditionally planned Mary dies where the sun sets (it is interesting to note the occurrence of the eikon of 'Jesus Sleeping' under the Dormition of the Virgin as at e.g., Protaton, Xenophon, Dochiariou), and is represented as alive and holding our Lord in her arms in the east wall of the church where the sun rises.

We can therefore dismiss assertions that Byzantine art never represented the Assumption, together with assertions of the opposite extreme to the effect that it was Byzantium which first possessed the complete Mariological cycle of iconography.<sup>1</sup> When we reflect on Byzantine diffidence with regard to the statement of the doctrine of the Assumption in iconography we must remember that its iconographical traditions date from a period when no explicit formulation had yet been reached. That the Byzantines did, at the end of the process, arrive at a clear belief is certain and the iconography bears witness as we have seen. The apparent backwardness of the Byzantine artist is in large measure that sense of understatement which he employs habitually in his portrayal of the Christian mysteries and which is one of the most powerful attractions of Byzantine art. The Byzantines, for instance, could certainly never have arrived at such a representation of the Assumption as Didron reproduced in *Annales Archéologiques* for 1852 (p. 309): a marble base relief originating at St Jacques-la Boucherie and now in the Abbey Church of St Denys. At the bottom the twelve apostles assist at the death of the Virgin. St Peter, vested, places a palm in her hand; St Andrew prays, St Paul preaches, St John joins his hands in sorrow, an apostle censures the body. Above, the Virgin, with one foot on a cloud and one on an angel, mounts to heaven accompanied the four angelini with musical instruments. The Holy Mother of God is represented as completely nude—a classical Venus with a transparent sash which floats across her body. It is a representation which is in no sense typical of western art, but the fact remains that for the Byzantine it would have been quite impossible to portray this great mystery in such a way. We would also call attention to the very Christ-centred manner of Byzantine representation, a trait shared with western representations of the middle ages when the two currents had a considerable

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the article of P. Duhr in *The Glorious Assumption*, pp. 97-8 (B.O., 1951), 'Byzantine art, which seems to have ignored the Assumption properly so called...' and the article *Assomption* in the dictionary 'Catholicisme'.

influence on one another but which Renaissance western art tended to humanize overmuch (Cf. Murillo).<sup>1</sup>

We may end this brief exposé with some words of John of Thessalonica taken from the end of his discourse :

Thus is the Falling Asleep of Mary the Mother of the Lord.

Our Lord and God Jesus Christ, Glorifier of His pure Mother and Godbearer Mary, will glorify those who glorify her, and will magnify those who magnify her, not only in this world, but in the world to come, and will bring them into his heavenly kingdom. (Patr. Orient XIX.)

DOM EDMUND M. JONES,

*Benedictine monk of the Olivetan Congregation,  
'Vita et Pax', Louvain.*

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

The best account of the iconography is to be found in the article in *Byzantino-Slavica*, t. III, 1931 by L. Wratislaw-Mitrovitch and N. Okunev. But I have also found useful among others : P. Duhr's article in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* for February 1950; Dom Bernard Capelle's masterly article in the same review for December 1950 on the theology of the Assumption.

<sup>1</sup> P. Duhr has pointed out the interesting testimony of the apocryphas and therefore of the Eikons to the importance given to S. Peter in the accounts of the Dormition. In, for instance, the discourse of John of Thessalonica, St Paul addresses St Peter, 'Peter, our father, the first among us by the will of God (*ἐκ θεοῦ*)' (Patr. Orient, XIX, 415) and St John, 'You are our father and Bishop; you must march at our head' (p. 427). One must bear in mind, of course, the special relations existing between Thessalonica and Rome, but even so the texts are worthy of note. St Germanos of Constantinople (+ 733) repeats the thought (P.G., t. XCVIII, col. 368).

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#### TWO ILLUSTRATIONS (A and B)

These two photographs of Serbian 'Dormitions' have been kindly lent by Professor David Talbot Rice together with the descriptions below.

##### A. (*frontispiece*) DORMITION OF THE VIRGIN.

S. Sophia, Ochrida. Before 1056.

The composition occupies the whole West wall and is 24 sq. metres in extent.

It is a magnificent example of the painting of the period, which is otherwise little known on a grand scale.

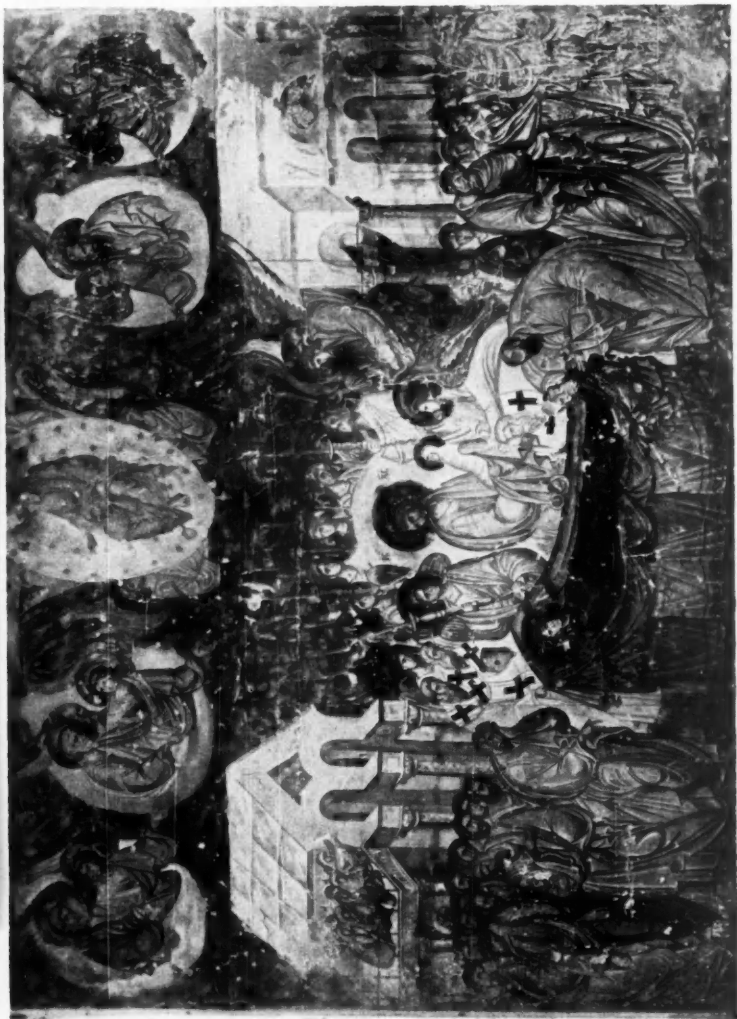
##### B. DORMITION OF THE VIRGIN.

Sopocani, Yugoslavia. 1255—1285.

The colours are fresh and light and the composition is especially vigorous and lively for the period.



The image upon the West door of the Cathedral at Souzdal in Russia (thirteenth century) : the door is copper which has taken on the sombre colour of bronze (that is, black). The design is an engraving, the lines of which have been filled with gold. Above we see the Assumption of the Virgin. She is borne by two angels in an almond-shaped aureole. The third angel hands the Virgin's girdle to St Thomas who is flying also accompanied by an angel. Below St Thomas deposits the girdle upon an altar which is canopied. The West door opens in two halves. There are twenty-four images in six ranks. The scene of the handing of the girdle is to be seen on the second rank below ; it is the first on the right as the observer looks. Vd *Russian Antiquities in Works of Art*, published by J. Tolstoi and N. Kondakoff, Fasc. 6 St Petersburg, 1899, pp. 65-71 (in Russian).



*By Courtesy of Professor David Talbot Rice*

## THE DORMITION AND ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN SLAV ICONOGRAPHY<sup>1</sup>

THE most ancient specimens of Byzantine art concerning the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin which are known to us almost all date from the eleventh century. At this epoch the composition of the Dormition appears as finally fixed, which goes to prove that the images of the eleventh century are not the first. These are the essential characteristics of the composition of the Dormition in the eleventh century: The central part of the painting is occupied by the bed on which the Blessed Virgin lies. At the head and foot of the bed there are two groups of Apostles. At the head of the group (on the left) stands St Peter, a censer in his hand, at the right St Paul bows towards the feet of the Virgin. Beyond the bed, in the middle, an old man is seen, with no hair, who weeps upon the right shoulder of Mary; it is the Apostle St John. On the second plane (in the centre or sometimes on the right) Christ is seen standing upright, holding in his arms His Mother's soul represented under the form of a little child in swaddling clothes. In the background on both sides are seen two little buildings, and high up two little angels coming down from heaven, to all appearances to take the soul of Mary from the arms of Christ. The two buildings denote that the action takes place in the house of Mary (otherwise called the Sion-chamber, that is to say a house on Mount Sion in Jerusalem where the Last Supper took place and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles).<sup>2</sup>

It is in certain representations of the eleventh century likewise that among those standing around are seen two personages in episcopal dress—St James, brother of the Lord, first bishop of Jerusalem, and St Denis the Areopagite (Acts xviii, 34). In fact it was no later than the seventh century that the belief was already current that at the Blessed Virgin's death several bishops assisted, notably St James and the disciples of St Paul, St Timothy and St Hierotheos.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly in the eleventh century another detail comes to light: above the group of apostles who are weeping the angel is seen flying towards Christ, and behind him a cloud in which there are apostles.

Such, in broad outline, is the composition of the eleventh century, which remains more or less invaried till the twelfth,

apart from certain minute new details which do not modify it noticeably (for example, women upon the upper plane of the buildings, a candlestick and candle burning before the bed, the fiery aureole surrounding Christ, the number of bishops increased).<sup>4</sup> The introduction of these details is quite in line with the apocryphal accounts.

New characteristics of considerable importance appear in Serbian iconography. In the first place there is the beginning of the representation of the translation of the Virgin's body together with the scene of the attempt of the Jew (Jephonias) to overturn the bed upon which the Virgin's body lies.

But all at once an angel comes down from heaven and cuts off with his fiery sword the hands of the Jew in such a way that they remain hanging at the side of the bed.

The representation of this episode finds its place first of all upon those paintings which have for their special subject the translation of the body of Mary.

Such is the engraving upon the bronze door of the cathedral of Souzdal in Russia (dating from the beginning of the thirteenth century) such is the mural painting in a little church of St Joachim and St Anne at Studenitsa in Serbia (from the fourteenth).

At the same time the tendency begins to connect the Jephonias episode with the traditional scene of the Dormition of Mary: before the deathbed of the Virgin two little figures are seen: that of the angel, sword in hand, and that of Jephonias with arms cut off and attached to the side of the bed. This scene can be observed in a miniature in a Greek gospel of the thirteenth century at the Ambrosian Library (ND 67, Sup. Feuillet 137).

But the most interesting detail is the introduction into the Dormition scene of the Assumption itself of Mary together with the handing over of the girdle to St Thomas. It is curious to note that the earliest representation of this event appears in the thirteenth century in the East as well as in the West.<sup>5</sup>

The earliest representation of the Assumption in this form is found upon the door of the cathedral at Souzdal (thirteenth century) which we have already mentioned. There the Virgin is portrayed seated and in the *orante* position, in an aureole in the form of an almond, the arms are held open before the breast. The aureole is carried by two angels in flight. A third angel, with sceptre in hand, gives the Virgin's girdle to St Thomas who draws near upon a cloud, accompanied by an angel. Below is shown how the Apostle places the girdle upon the altar of the church.

In mural painting the earliest portrayals of this scene are found in Serbia. They date from the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries. But as we show in its proper place in speaking of the door of the Cathedral at Souzdal, these Serbian representations are not the earliest in general. The fourteenth century mural painting of many Serbian churches often exhibits a whole cycle of scenes illustrating the complete account of the Dormition-Assumption. Outside Serbia up to the present we know of only three similar cycles which treat of the events of the Dormition. One of these dates from the thirteenth century: again once more we return to the door of the cathedral at Souzdal. The following scenes are to be observed: the translation of the body to the tomb, the laying aside of the Virgin's clothing in the presence of angels coming down from heaven, the Dormition under its traditional forms, and the Assumption, with the giving of the girdle to St Thomas who afterwards lays it on the altar. Western influence is seen in the introduction of the episode of Jephonias and of the Assumption. The other cycles of the Dormition are found in the painting in the church of Brontonchion at Mistra (fourteenth century) and in the Roumanian church at Arges (fourteenth).<sup>6</sup>

For, the most part Byzantine art can be said to be content with portraying the Dormition of Mary. Her Assumption in the form of giving the girdle to St Thomas, as in the Copto-Egyptian tradition, penetrating into Byzantine art probably through the West, is rarely represented except in Serbian iconography where it is seen rather often during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

And yet it would be rash to assert categorically that the portrayal of the Assumption is absolutely foreign to Eastern religious art. In fact we know of many paintings where, above the Dormition, we see the Virgin enthroned. She is thus represented twice: lying on her death-bed, and reigning in heaven. That is the whole idea of the Assumption: the Virgin is the Queen of heaven and earth, a thing which could not be but for her glorious Assumption.<sup>7</sup>

Such, for example, is a Roumanian eikon of the sixteenth century, such are many Russian eikons: those of the cathedrals of Novgorod, Vologda, and of the Museum of Christian Art in Kiev.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from the direct representation of the Assumption, we should not forget that Eastern Christian iconography quite often expresses itself symbolically. The symbol of the Assumption is that palm-branch which the archangel gave to the Virgin.

In the cathedral of Novgorod we see three eikons each exhibiting this branch :

- (1) The Archangel *bears* the branch to the Virgin before the Dormition ;
- (2) The Virgin *receives* the branch borne by the Archangel ;
- (3) The Virgin *shows* the branch to the Faithful.

Now, if we remember that the fiery branch brought from Paradise was meant to serve as a sign of the Resurrection and Assumption of the Mother of God after her brief *Dormition*, it will be clear to us that the idea of the Assumption of the Mother of God is always present in Eastern iconography, explicitly or implicitly.

If we speak especially of Russian iconography we must be able to find there the general tendencies of Byzantine iconography of which we have already spoken. Taking up once more the theme of the evolution of Russian iconography, it can be said that up to the seventeenth century it remains faithful to the traditions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, if we leave out of account the evolution of technique. In the eighteenth century Russian religious art found itself confronted with the great danger of being destroyed by the influence of profane art from the West. Nevertheless the traditional character of Russian iconography was maintained.

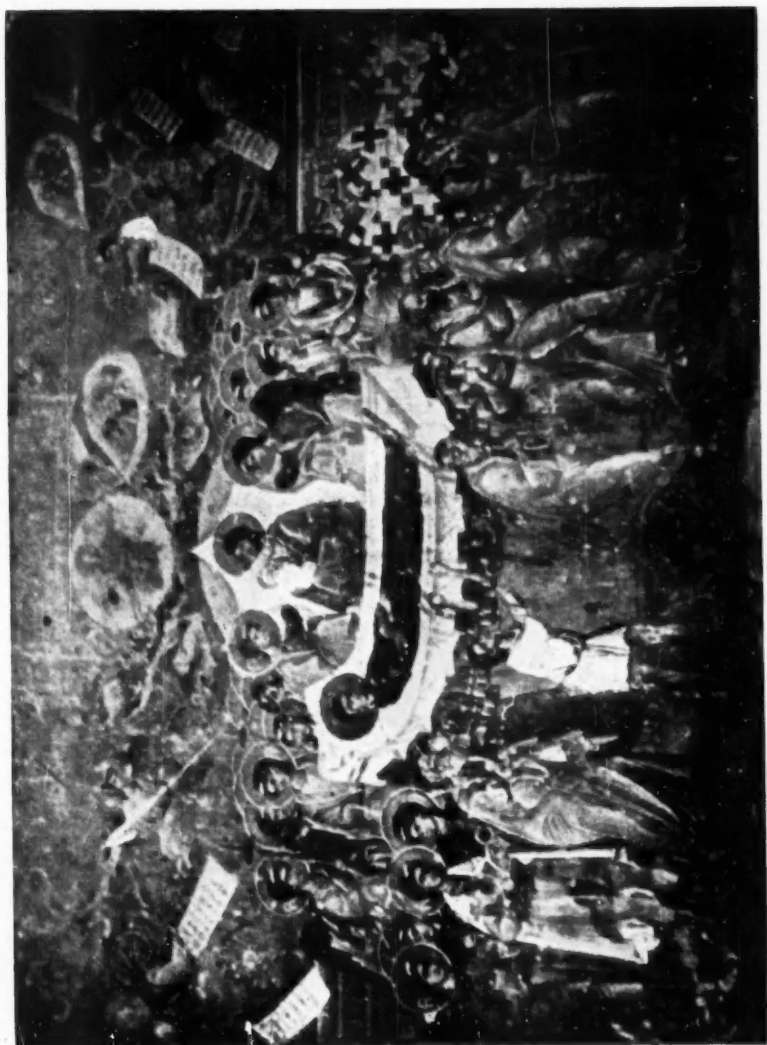
We are showing some reproductions here which will serve to illustrate what has been said on the subject of Byzantine art, and, in particular, of Russian art, in respect of the iconography of the Dormition and of the Assumption of the Most Holy Mother of God, Mary Ever-Virgin.

MICHAEL GAVRILOFF.

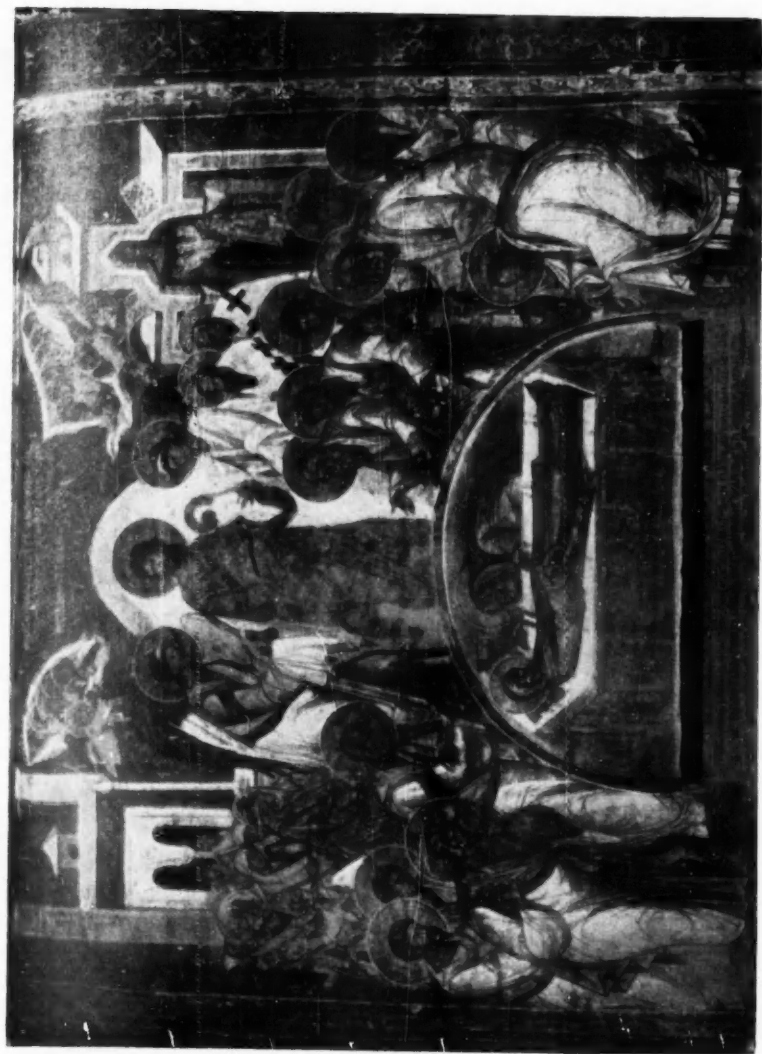
(Translation by R.G.R.)

#### NOTES

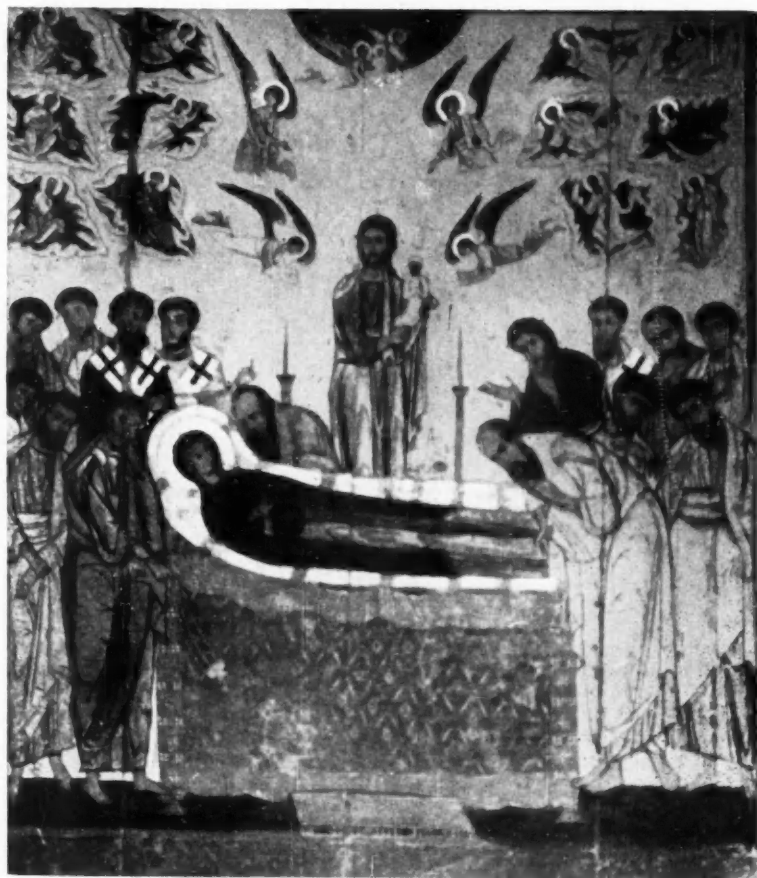
<sup>1</sup> For the details of the literary tradition we refer the reader to the following works : (a) the texts have been published by Tischendorf, *Apocalypses. Apocryphae*, 1866. (b) The works : Porfiriev, *Apocryphal accounts of personages and events of the New Testament*, St Petersburg, 1890, in Russian. Especially on the subject of the Dormition : Sinding, *Mariae Tod*. Christiania, 1903. Baumstark, *Die Leibliche Himmelfahrt der Jungfrau in Oriens Christianus*, 1904, IV. The same author, *Zwei Syrische*

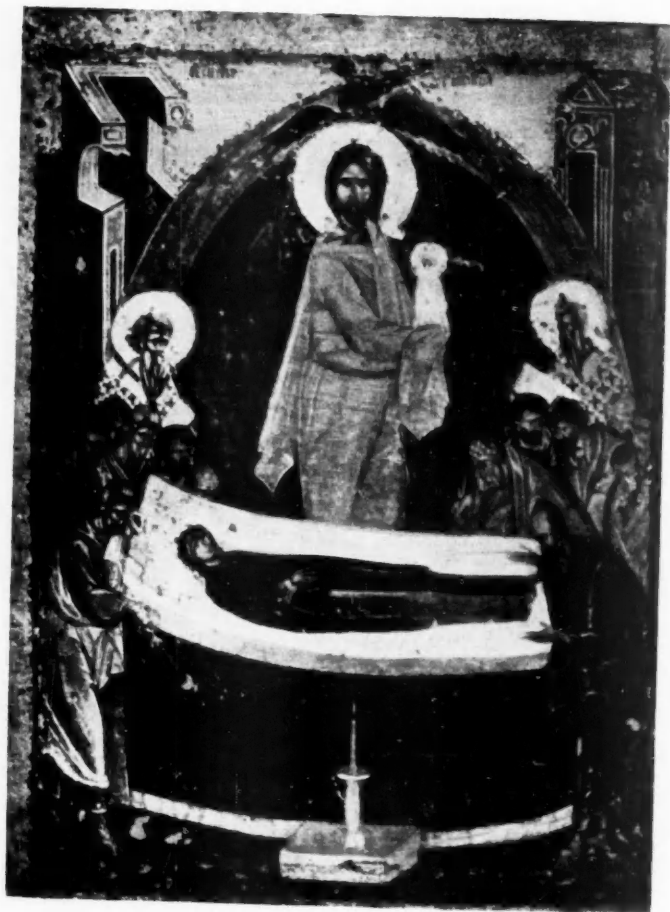


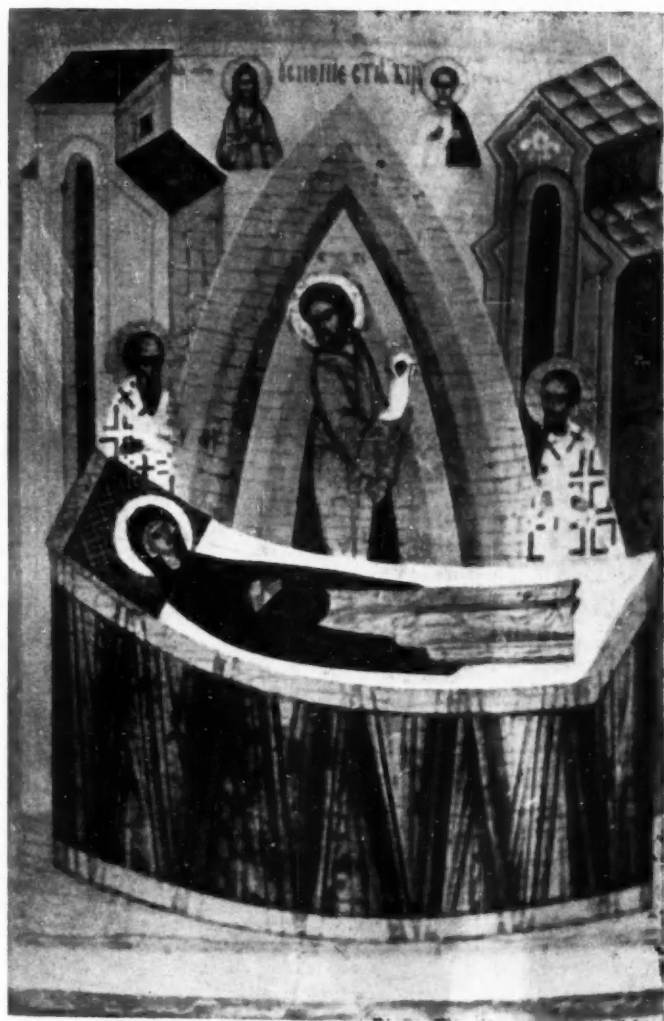


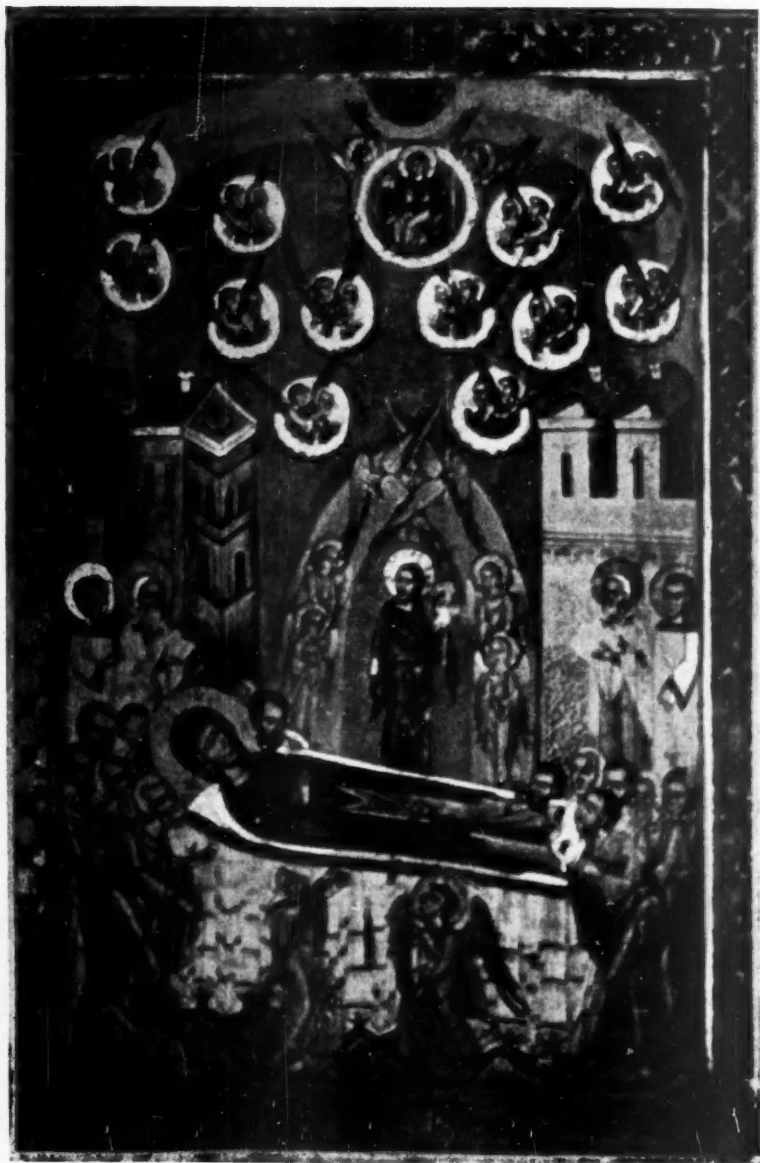


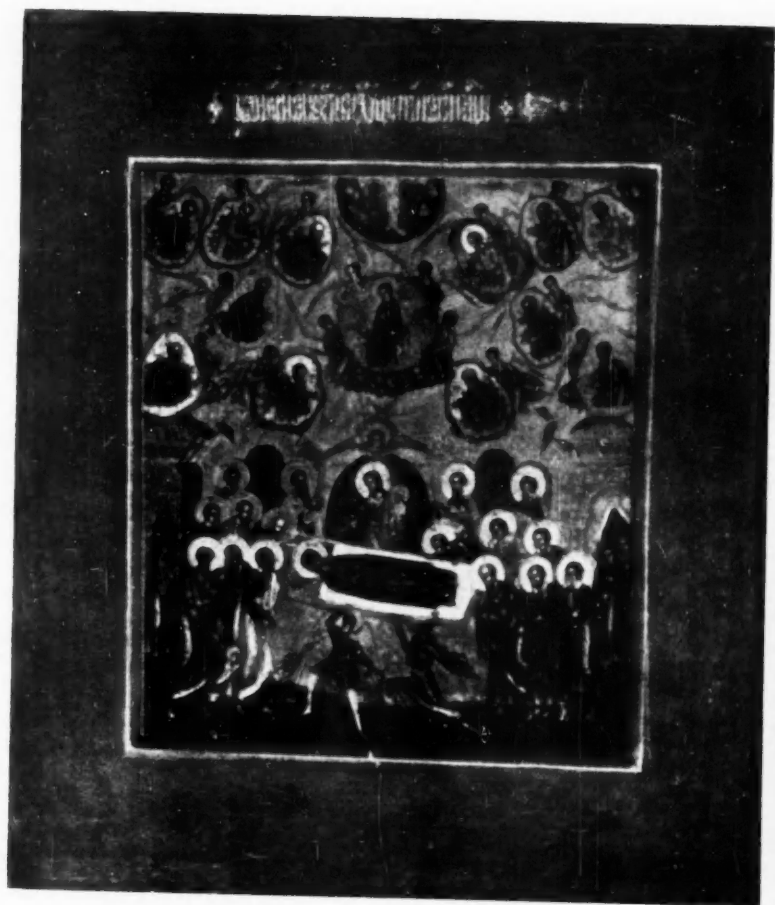














*Dichtungen auf das Entschlafen der Jungfrau*, in *Oriens Christianus*, 1905, V. A. Smith-Lewis, *Apocrypha Syriaca*, London, 1902.  
(c) The Literary tradition together with the iconography: A. J. Kirpitschnikov, *The Dormition of the Mother of God in Legend and Art* (in Russian), publication of the Archeological Congress in Odessa, 1884-88, pp. 191-235.

Mme Ludmila-Wratislaw-Mitrovitch and N. Okunev, *La Dormition de la Ste Vierge dans la Peinture Medievale Orthodoxe in Byzantino-Slavica* III, and *Praba*, 1931, pp. 134-80. Vatasianu, *Dormitio Virginis in the Ephemeris Dacoromana* VI, Rome, 1935, pp. 1-49, in Italian.

<sup>2</sup> This last indication forms part of a late tradition which appears for the first time in the work of Sophronios, patriarch of Constantinople in the seventh century, PG 87, c. 384.

<sup>3</sup> It seems that the last name occurs only in the Pseudo-Denis, vii chap. iii of the *Divine Names*, PG III, c. 681, dating probably from the fifth century.

<sup>4</sup> V. art. cit. by Wratislaw-Mitrovitch and Okunev, pp. 141-7.

<sup>5</sup> V. art. cit. by Wratislaw-Mitrovitch and Okunev, p. 156. Also E. Mâle, *L'Art religieux au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle en France*, Paris, 1923, p. 956.

<sup>6</sup> V. Wratislaw, etc., p. 162. Cf. the article of N. Jorga, *Les Variations du Type de la Dormition de la Vierge dans le vieil Art roumain* in the *Recueil d'études dédiées à la mémoire de N. P. Kondakov* published in *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, Prague, 1926, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> V. Jorga, art. cit., p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> V. Kirpitschnikov, art. cit., pp. 219-21.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

(1) Fresco of Staro-Nagoritchino in Serbia (1317). The death of Mary is replaced by her burial, Jephonias has taken hold of the bed, and his hands are already cut off. The avenging angel above replaces his sword. In front of the bed Paul, Andrew and Peter with censer, John weeping with three other apostles. Three bishops in the background. Angels at the head of the bed, one with a censer. Women follow the procession, which leads towards an open tomb in the right corner. Christ with Mary's soul behind the bed. Many angels with Tpers surround the aureole. Above, the girdle is given to St tahomas who is borne on a cloud. The other apostles again represented borne on the two sides upon clouds with angels.

Above, prophets and other O.T. personages who referred to Mary. All carry scrolls, with texts of Scripture. Before most of them lies some symbol of the Virgin. On the left Isaias, Moses with the burning bush, Gedeon with the dewy fleece, Ezechiel with the closed door. On the right Daniel with the rock, Balaam with the aureole star-shaped, David with a ship, Solomon with his temple (III Kings, viii, 13).

V. art. of Wratislaw-Mitrovitch and N. Okunev in *Byz.-Slav.* III, 1, pl. 7.

(2) Dormition cycle at Detchany in Serbia (1348). Mural painting (Frescoes). On the right the Virgin in prayer before her death on the Mount of Olives. The trees bow and salute her. A rocky countryside. Above a segment of heaven and a hand blessing and a ray. Right, the Virgin gives the girdle to St Thomas. V. *The Monastery of Detchany*, ed. Serbian Royal Academy, Belgrade 1941 (in Serbian), pl. CLXXXII.

(3) The same. John leans over the bed placed in a semi-circle. Four apostles, Peter at the head on the left, and seven, Paul at the head on the right. Peter has no censor. In an almond-shaped aureole Christ holds Mary's soul in his left-hand, and points to her body with his right. Behind, apostles; left, women; right, two bishops. High up two groups of apostles borne on two clouds, five left, six right, without Thomas.

Each group accompanied by an angel. Above the bed an inscription: 'O apostles, come from every land and take my body and bury it in Gethsemane. Thou, my son and my God, receive my soul.' Below, date, names of princes, etc. *The Monastery of Detchany*, pl. CLXXXV.

(4) The same. Right, translation of body of Mary. Jephonias not in front but behind bed. Angel with sword left, in the sky. Right, apostles examine tomb and find it empty. Inscription: 'The third day the apostles and Thomas with them, as if he had arrived late, went to the tomb and found it void. They did not find her body, for her son and God took it to the place where He alone knows.' *The Monastery of Detchany*, pl. CLXXXVI.

(5) The Dormition of the Virgin, Gallery of Tretiakov at Moscow. First half on thirteenth century. The twelve apostles below, and twelve above on twelve clouds with angels. Painter did not know the episode of girdle. High up the soul of the Virgin carried to heaven by two angels. Below, the same angels ready to receive the soul from the hands of Christ who is behind the bed. V. Lazarev, *L'Art de Novgorode*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1947, pl. 28 (in Russian).

(6) Eikon of the Dormition by Theophane the Greek (end of fourteenth century). Painted on reverse of miraculous eikon of the Virgin of Don. Unspoiled early tradition. Confined to two persons strictly necessary: horizontal, the Virgin on her bed, Vertical, the figure of Christ, to which corresponds below the candlestick and candle. Two groups of apostles and two bishops. Much movement in portrayal of apostles. Wratislaw-Mitrovitch and Okunev in *Byz.-Slav.* III, p. xviii.

(7) Dormition. Russian eikon of beginning of fifteenth century in Russian Museum. No apostles, only Virgin, Christ and two bishops. Above St John Baptist and St Stephen. N. P. Kondakov, *L'Icone Russe*, II Album, 1929, *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, pl. 18.

(8) Dormition, eikon of the sixteenth century from the Ukraine, Galizia, district of Scole. The Virgin is represented twice: upon her deathbed, and higher up carried in the flesh by angels (Assumption). *Ikonenbilder der Galizischen Ukraine*, XV-XVI. Lwow, 1929, pl. 173 (German and Ukrainian).

(9) Dormition. Complex composition from collection of N. P. Likhatchev. Assumption of the Virgin who is enthroned in a round aureole. Below Jephonias episode. Painter did not know episode of St Thomas. (The no. of Apostles 1) Probably fifteenth century. V. Likhatchev, *Les Matériaux pour l'histoire de l'iconographie russe*, IIe partie, St Petersburg, 1906, pl. 629.

(10) Dormition. Collection of Likhatchev, pl. 439, with episode of Jephonias, probably sixteenth century.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor, EASTERN CHURCHES QUARTERLY.

DEAR FATHER,

Having contributed an *E.C.Q.* article on 'The Light of God in the Theology of St Bonaventure', I have been particularly pleased with Professor Lossky's paper on 'Darkness and Light in the Knowledge of God', in your last winter issue. If I am not mistaken, the author's main concern is to point out a few Patristic antecedents of the Palamite 'theology of light'. At any rate, a broad hint in the conclusion allows us to view the article in that way. If so, the central statement—

that the 'theology of darkness' was but a metaphor of a dogmatic truth—seems to call for comment.

Professor Lossky confronts the fact that the Fathers, speaking of the mystery of God's being and his knowability, use two sets of expressions, one of which is borrowed from the idea of 'darkness', and the other makes fuel of the idea of 'light'. Now, Palamite theology, whilst applying the vocabulary of 'darkness' to the unknowable essence of God, is exclusively a 'theology of light' when it comes to explaining mystical experience and the nature of grace. The gist of the problem, then, may be put in the following way: is Palamas faithful to both sets of Patristic expressions, or else does he misinterpret the Fathers' mind on 'darkness' in the knowledge of God?

M. Lossky's answer explains the 'theology of darkness' as a proviso meant to safeguard the dogmatic truth of the unknowability of God; and considers the 'theology of light' as an exact translation of mystical experience. The idea of 'darkness' in St Gregory of Nyssa and 'Dionysius' would be a dogmatic correction imposed upon the mystical doctrine of Origen, Evagrius and St Gregory Nazianzen. These, either do not mention 'darkness' at all, or else interpret it as a hindrance to be outgrown before meeting the 'light' of God; whereas 'darkness' would, in fact, be a mode of union with God beyond the realm of 'light'. As 'light' is, equivalently, the domain of the knowledge of God, that 'dark' mode of union transcends all perception: in a later vocabulary, the 'superessence' of God hides beyond his 'energies'.

Is it so sure that the witness of St Gregory of Nyssa is patient of no other development than that which was provided by the fourteenth century doctrine on the 'Uncreated Light'? I am inclined to doubt it, for—to give one motive to which M. Lossky would presumably be sensible—the assertion of the unknowability of God does not rest solely upon a dogmatic conviction; it is a fact of experience to which the mystics testify. To substantiate this, I would suggest that the opposition drawn (p. 466) between St Gregory of Nyssa and St John of the Cross, true as far as it goes, is by no means complete. Admittedly, the 'dark nights' of the latter do not correspond with the 'darkness' which St Gregory equates with an endless search after the 'essence' of God. Nevertheless this 'darkness' seems to be no other than the 'serene night' alluded to at the end of the *Spiritual Canticle* and in the *Living Flame*, or the 'unknown darkness' that Bl. John Ruysbroeck lists as the

seventh step of the 'Ladder of Spiritual Love'. We may thus question the opinion that Gregory of Nyssa wants but to 'remind us of a dogmatic fact' (p. 466).

If the climax of mystical contemplation is really apophatic, then it seems logical to assume that the highest knowledge of God is at the same time 'dark' and 'luminous', that it reaches both the immanence and the transcendence of God, his 'energies' and his 'superessence'. 'Light' and 'darkness' are not successive tempos in the union with God, but rather joint elements of both union with and knowledge of him. Should we not say, correspondingly, that the 'energies' and the 'essence' of God are simultaneously contacted or—using another metaphor—seen? Thence, to my mind, the better theological expression of the dilemma which is inherent in the knowledge of God would not be: 'energies and not essence', but: 'totus sed non totaliter'.

It does not belong to me to recognize in this a bridge between two theologies. Indeed it may be that further study of the Patristic tradition would be needed before adopting a definite view on this point. Till then, at all events, the claim of Palamism to be a genuine development of Patristic theology and, withal, its intrinsic soundness, ought to remain a moot question.

It goes without saying, I have written this as an eirenic attempt at sorting out a 'theology of light' acceptable to East and West alike, from what may be unnecessary accretions. Let it be read only in this spirit.

Yours most sincerely,

G. H. TAVARD, A.A.

PARIS.

30th May 1951.

DEAR FATHER BEDE,

Thank you very much for having sent me a copy of the Rev. G. H. Tavard's letter concerning my article on 'Darkness and Light in the Knowledge of God'.

Here are a few points that I find it is necessary for me to make without however having any illusions about an easy conciliation of the two theologies.

I.—Fr Tavard sees in my assertion that the 'Theology of Darkness' in the Fathers is but a metaphor of a dogmatic truth, a 'palamite' interpretation that would bias the patristic meaning of 'Darkness' in the knowledge of God. It would be enough to refer him to Professor Ch. H. Puech's remarkable study on *'la ténèbre mystique chez le Ps. Denys l'Aréopagite et*

*dans la tradition patristique* (in *Nuit mystique*, Etudes Carmélitaines, 23e. année, Vol. II). The author concludes as follows (pp. 53-53):

'Formellement la Nuée biblique est l'amorce principale de ce qui deviendra "la mystique nocturne". Mais en fait, elle n'est transmise et traitée dans la tradition patristique que comme un thème allégorique, une image chargée d'illustrer une thèse dogmatique, et elle y garde encore quelque chose de théorique et d'abstrait. La Nuée, l'Obscurité, la Nuit ne paraissent pas correspondre à des symboles immanents à l'expérience mystique: elles sont plutôt des motifs extérieurs et occasionnels, utilisés par une spéculation dogmatique soucieuse de marquer les limites ou de fixer certaines modalités nécessaires de la vision mystique de Dieu.'

This reference to one of the best patrologists in our time shows sufficiently well that the thesis I took up again after Mr Puech to develop a few points of it in my article, is not necessarily due to a 'palamite' orientation. Besides, it would be necessary to prove that St Gregory Palamas ever spoke of the metaphoric meaning of darkness in the Fathers.

II.—I entirely agree with Fr Tavad that 'the assertion of the unknowability of God does not solely rest upon a dogmatic conviction; it is a fact of experience of which the mystics testify'.

It is clear that the Transcendence of God, which is a dogmatic truth, can and must be mystically experienced (when it is not, we are dealing with an heterodox mysticism). But the question is whether patristic tradition has known an *experience of darkness* beyond Light, or whether 'darkness' (in the objective sense of the word) is a metaphoric phrase showing the consciousness of the transcendent character of the 'superessence'—which would be inherent in every luminous experience of God. As regards St Gregory of Nyssa as well as other Fathers who spoke of 'divine darkness', I adopt the last alternative.

III.—I do not think as Fr Tavad does, that one might draw a parallel between St Gregory of Nyssa's 'darkness' and St John of the Cross's 'serene night'. Indeed, as he comments upon the following line of the *Spiritual Canticle* (str. XXXIX, v, 6): 'en la noche serena', the Castilian mystic identifies the 'serene night' with the 'dark contemplation' in which God secretly nourishes the soul, 'stealthily', unfelt by any corporal or spiritual faculty. In the *Ascension of the Carmel* (B.I. ch. II, str. v, 6). St John of the Cross terms this third part

of the night as 'dawn' which is immediately followed by daylight, i.e. the beatific vision. As the vision of the essence of God may only be realized after death, the mystic asks the 'living flame of Love' to tear the tissue of life: 'rompe la tela deste dulce encuentro' (*Llama viva*, str. I, v, 6). For St John of the Cross the night has a limit as it ends up in the vision of the essence. For St Gregory of Nyssa, beatitude is realized in an infinite nocturnal chase as God remains inaccessible in His essence (J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, pp. 319-323). In these two instances the 'night' is to be found in different doctrinal contexts: the Spanish contemplative is plunged into a 'dark night', actual experience of 'darkness'; nevertheless he knows, instructed by his faith, that God is Light.

On the other hand, the Cappadocian Father is in actual experience of Light and uses 'darkness' as a metaphor to express his consciousness of God-Light who remains essentially transcendent.

IV.—I never claimed that 'light' and 'darkness' were two successive stages in the union with God. On the contrary, I insisted on their simultaneousness and thereby underlined the metaphoric character of the word 'darkness' in the patristic tradition. As to the expression 'energies and not essence' that Fr Tavad would like to replace by another: 'totus sed non totaliter', to my mind both expressions are equally unsatisfactory. The 'energies'—a technical term in Byzantine theology—must not be understood as a 'knowable "part"' of God beside another unknowable one which would be the 'superessence'. We do not know the 'energies' but God Himself, who, totally inaccessible in His essence, gives Himself totally in the energies or, in other words, in grace.

V.—My chief concern in this article was not to find 'Patristic antecedents' of the 'Palamite' theology of light. However, it is quite natural that an orthodox theologian should see in what in the West is called 'Palamism' (distinction between essence and energies) a dogmatic expression of the Tradition of the Church. There is therefore nothing astonishing in the fact that his view of the theology of the first centuries' Fathers should be different from that of a theologian of the Church of Rome, whose concern is to avoid the 'palamite' solution; for it seems impossible to him to conciliate it with the doctrine of intuitive vision of the essence (Constitution of 1336). Indeed, these 'patristic antecedents of palamism'—if one does not succeed in eliminating them by interpreting

the texts in a sense favourable to scholastic theology (sometimes 'obtorto quodammodo collo' as Petavius put it)—will oblige a Roman Catholic theologian to accept Gabriel Vasquez' radical thesis: as the dogma of intuitive vision was not yet defined, many an Eastern Father (and among the Western ones, Ambrose, Jerome and a few others) were positively mistaken on this point (Comment. ac disput. in I-am partem S. Thomae, Vol. I, disp. XXXVII, chap. i-iv). One must bear this in mind to understand Fr Tavard's delicate situation and his desire of a doctrinal clarification which is only too legitimate. I expect much, as Fr Tavard does, from a study in 'Patristic Tradition' but I take the liberty to express a doubt:

I do not think that Fr Tavard, who suggests we should wait for the results of these studies on Patristic thought before expressing a definite judgement upon 'Palamism', will admit in his turn that, for the time being the claim of thomism 'to be' a genuine development of Patristic theology and, withal, its intrinsic soundness, ought to remain a moot question.

Once again, I thank you, dear Father, for the opportunity you gave me to engage with Fr Tavard this dialogue which I hope will prove useful for a mutual understanding.

Yours very sincerely,

VLADIMIR LOSSKY.

#### PHILO'S BIBLE

DEAR FATHER,

The reviewer of my *Philo's Bible* in your Spring Number drew attention to what he called my 'antisemitism', and instanced my treatment of Aquila. I agree that my treatment of Aquila does disclose strong resentment. But its source is neither racial nor controversial feeling, but a linguist's and philologist's aversion to any substitutes for the living languages which are a precious gift of God's creation. Aquila tries to write Hebrew while using Greek vocables. Everywhere he renders rigidly each Hebrew word (including homonyms!) by the same Greek word. Moreover his vocabulary mixes up in an unheard of way the most incompatible stylistic types of Greek literary writing (which the ancients had kept apart most carefully) and intermingles them with the most ridiculous made-up words. Add to this the fact that Aquila was almost certainly a gentile and a proselyte, and my alleged 'antisemitism' falls to the ground.

Yours faithfully,

Cambridge

PETER KATZ.

## NEWS AND COMMENTS

We regret to announce the death of Archbishop Sawa of Grodno, he was a man of great experience, wise and kind and did very much for a better understanding between Orthodox and Catholics :—'In thy resting place, O Lord, where all thy saints repose, O rest thy servant's soul'.

### SOME CONTEMPORARIES

*Life of the Spirit* (November-December Number 1950), concerning the Assumption in the life of the Christian. This is a most valuable issue. Of special interest in connection with the problems that come up in the *E.C.Q.* are the final remarks in Fr Victor White's article 'The scandal of the Assumption', which we will quote :—

'One last question must still be mentioned, although it cannot be answered with any certainty. What next ? it is asked. Just where is this definition of dogmas going to stop ? Without prophetic eyes we cannot be sure, but it is legitimate and perhaps stimulating to speculate.

There can be no addition to the glories of Mary beyond those which God himself has given her in her Assumption. In her Assumption too is the crowning effect of the atoning work of the incarnate Word—its *ne plus ultra*. Perhaps some yet unborn and unsuspected heresy will evoke another dogmatic definition of some truth about Christ and his Mother, but it might seem reasonable to think that we are witnesses of the end of the whole cycle of dogmatic definitions relating to the Incarnation and its effect which began with the Council of Nicea ; in this respect too we may be standing at the end of an era. As the Assumption and Coronation of our Lady complete the triple crown of her Rosary, so perhaps their definition will complete the Church's confession of the mysteries of the Word made flesh.

But as her assumed body carries our eyes and thoughts with her to the unfathomable mysteries of the eternal God-head whither she goes, so we may wonder if the definition of her Assumption will not lead us further into those depths, and so mark the beginning as well as the end of an epoch. Perhaps it will lead the Church to closer consideration and ultimate formulation of the deep mystery of the "Motherhood of God". For by her Assumption Mary returns to her own eternal source, and not she but God himself is the ultimate and eternal prototype of Motherhood, Womanhood

—even materiality. Its presence does not seem far away even in scholastic presentations of the theology of the Trinity (in consideration of the “notion” of the Father’s *innascibilitas*; but far more in Eastern “apophatic” [negative] theology); and the Church’s liturgy has consistently seen in Mary the temporal embodiment of an eternal yet feminine Wisdom of God. The fact that Gnostics, Cabbalists, Boehme, the Russian sophiologists, and others have presented unacceptable formulations of this obscure mystery is not to say that it does not exist. It might seem that a clearer consciousness of it will be called for in any new Christian era that awaits our race; and that, humanly speaking, a deeper awareness of it will be necessary if the Gospel is ever to become intelligible to the cultures of the Far East and its teeming millions.

As Christ, ascending to heaven, leads the way to God our Eternal Father, perhaps Mary, assumed into the same heaven, will lead us to deeper knowledge and love of God our Eternal Mother.’

‘PAX ROMANA’

English edition, March–April 1951. Fribourg, Switzerland. This whole issue is devoted to Christian Unity: as a problem and a task.

WHITHER ANGLICAN ECCLESIOLOGY?

F. D. Maurice about a century ago evolved a theory of the Church which was in violent contrast to the Branch Theory: a universal Church not founded on the works or the faith of men, but upon the nature of God and on His union with creatures. The world is the Church without God; the Church is the world with its relation to God restored. The property of the Church is the revelation to men that the temporal is spiritual. We are all brethren in Christ, and baptism makes even the non-baptised members of the Church. The Church is one in Christ, but multiple in society; each religious body is at once the Church and a sect—schism is co-extensive with the Church.

Against this the Branch Theory makes out that the Church is composed of the sum-total of episcopal bodies, who may be separated by the accidents of human life. The one Church exists in a structure visibly broken.

The 'Maurician' theory, as expounded by A. R. Vidler, suggests that the C. of E. has been granted the characteristic of showing, more than the other churches, that the bond of unity is not found in any system, but rather in the confession and worship of the Holy Trinity. She does not confuse the signs of the kingdom of Christ with theories or dogmas. The future Church will be, says F. D. Maurice, 'a unified confession and cult of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.

L. Thornton goes further. 'The price of unity is a tension between different factors. Without this tension unity would cease to symbolize the divine mysteries . . . When the curtain falls on the last scene in the Bible we see not a state of rest but a movement of parts towards the whole.' Unity then is an eschatological phenomenon.

*The Common Life in the Body of Christ*, a work of Anglican biblical theology, treats of the Church and the human aspect of the divino-human organism. It has nothing about the biblical data on the structure of the local and universal Christian community, but the relation between the Church and Christ mystically is studied at length. The necessity of a 'holy brotherhood in which men can see the love of God reflected' is affirmed. The unity of the Church in faith and knowledge depends on her maturity. It seems that the author puts forward a conception of the Church in which the community forms itself by an aggregation of individuals, a conception of the Mystical Body tainted with anglicism.

Anglican theologians almost unanimously defend the divine origin of the episcopate. Their Church would be an association of sees, some of which through historical circumstances have attained an ascendancy. The historic episcopate is an organ of unity which binds together local churches. But they do not seem to see the internal connection between the Mystical Body and the Episcopate—an empirical function is not a justification.

E. L. Mascall, a thomist, explains the visible structure of the Church in relation to the Mystical Body by the nature of the sacramental order deriving from the Incarnation: 'incorporation in the apostolic college by the communication of the apostolic character'; the role of the bishop is to proclaim the faith to the Church and to the world and to defend it. Mascall says nothing of a jurisdictional power of the episcopate. He seems to conceive of the episcopate as virtually a charism which does not actualize except by the personal sanctity of the bishop. The essence of Christianity is incor-

poration in the Body, not in submission to the pope. In short he opposes the sacramental to the jurisdictional, and yet such an opposition dissolves the moment it is formulated.

William Temple, the most theological among recent archbishops of Canterbury thinks the errors of Rome are due to a confusion between the Mystical Body and the institutional, or rather an identification between the two. Anglican thought, at rock bottom, lacks the notion of the sacramental nature of the Church and the theological function of the sign or symbol.

It is not impossible that Anglican ecclesiology will develop further under the influence of the historians. You cannot leave the papacy out if you study Church history. Jalland writes: 'Is it not possible that after all the papacy be a Christian institution which cannot be put aside or misunderstood without a serious loss to the whole of Christianity. Should we not go further and ask: does it come from heaven or from men?'

All this represents the Anglican dilemma. A more profound reflexion on the manner in which the temporal serves as substratum to the spiritual, and in which a sociological organization is the efficacious symbol of the Mystical Body, this alone can direct our Anglican brethren towards the full Catholic truth.

(A synopsis of *Où va l'ecclésiologie anglicane* by Dr Georges Tavard, A.A., in *Année Théologique*, 1951, no. I.)

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

*The Assumption of Our Lady and Catholic Theology* by Victor Bennett and Raymond Winch. Pp. 116 (S.P.C.K.) 5s.

In this learned brochure, the authors propound, with reserve and discretion, their logical difficulties in face of the proposed definition of the Corporal Assumption of our Lady as a dogma of the Church. Their thesis is unambiguously stated at the end of the first chapter: 'Viewed in all its bearings, a dogmatic definition of the Assumption by the pope must seem a most unhappy development of the present religious situation. As well as being defective in all the relevant fields of evidence, the Assumption, if raised to a dogma, would have . . . unhappy repercussions on the prestige of the papacy, on the general trend of Roman Catholic devotion and on what is a burning question for the twentieth century, the reunion of Christendom.'

In all charity we are impelled to reply : (1) we hardly think the prestige of the papacy will suffer by the exercise of its infallible prerogative of defining the doctrine of the Church ; (2) it is very probable that the papacy is a better judge than we of 'its repercussions on the general trend of Roman Catholic devotion' ; and finally (3) that to suppress a doctrine in the interests of reunion would surely be counted political expediency overriding doctrinal integrity—a fatal accusation against a teaching Church and an impossible expedient for an infallible one.

In chapter two, the historical arguments are very fairly set out and subject to historical criteria, which shows Our Lady's Assumption to be historically possible or even probable but hardly certain. There follows in two chapters a critique of the 'theological arguments', which indeed are largely arguments from 'convenientia'—i.e., persuasive arguments which show that the Assumption of Our Lady is in line with the rest of her undoubted privileges, a counterpart to her Immaculate Conception and so forth. Which again is not, of itself, convincing.

Chapter five is headed : 'The Dogmatic Criteria' ; in which the authors contend that the doctrine of our Lady's Assumption, being contained neither in Scripture nor in Tradition, 'cannot be infallibly defined to be a dogma of the Catholic Faith'. The argument deserves—and will probably receive elsewhere—fuller treatment than is permissible in a short book notice ; but may we not suggest to the authors that 'Tradition' is not equivalent to the ancient writers of the Church. It includes them, of course, but it also includes the oral tradition—what is actually taught by the Church universal. If it is being taught now explicitly, it must, *ex hypothesi*, the Church being infallible, have always been taught at least implicitly.

How then are we to know which current opinions are in fact essential articles of the Church's teaching and which mere devotional or philosophico-religious fashions ? The answer is clear : the extraordinary *magisterium* of the Council or the Pope sometimes defines it, saying : 'This is in fact the Catholic tradition. This believe, or flout my authority.' Until Pope or Council so defines we may indeed argue whether a certain doctrine belongs to Tradition but afterwards *Roma locuta est, causa finita est*.

The last two chapters bring forward arguments against the expediency of this definition now ; arguments towards

which this reviewer feels much sympathy ; in fact he expressed somewhat similar views in this Quarterly some three years ago. Nothing has occurred to change those views, yet he is inclined to think that the pope's judgement of the expediency of what he proposes to do is more likely to be correct than the reviewer's own !

There the matter rests.

DOM H. D. THOMAS RIGBY.

*Charles Boyer, S.J.—Unus Pastor.* Pour la réunion a l'Eglise de Rome des Chrétiens séparés. Toulouse, Apostolat de la prière, 9 Rue Monplaisir ; in—12, pp. 104. 130 fr.

Father Boyer, S.J., professor at the Gregorian University and president of the *Unitas* Association, gives us a kind of short introduction to the problem of Christian Unity. While Father Congar's *Chrétiens désunis* spoke in its own day to a theologically cultivated public and could therefore deal theologically with its subject, *Unus Pastor* appears for the Unity Octave of 1951, fifteen years later and in a more mature œcumenical situation. It is the result of a revision of previous writings, and is addressed to a more general public to foster love of the cause of union. Its theological premises are very succinctly explained, and they are clear and in complete conformity with pontifical directives, especially with the recent instruction of the Holy Office. There are six chapters ; the first five deal with the state of relations between separated Christians, and the sixth with methods of bettering them.

The main interest of the volume comes from the theological and unionist authority of the author. Among a host of interesting things these points are striking : the considered unionist optimism of Father Boyer, his approval of what has been done for reunion from the Catholic side (p. 93) and his hope that this action may flourish more and more effectively in the future, his sympathy towards the Œcumenical Council (p. 31), his sympathy for the Malines conversations (p. 66) and above all for the principle underlying them, the use of 'pravoslav' instead of 'orthodox' etc. Inexactitudes are rare and negligible (the Utrecht Conference was in 1938 and not in 1939, p. 23, possibly a misprint). One omission causes regret : 'non-roman catholicism' is not even mentioned ; but this œcumenical expression stands for a most important unionist reality.

DOM CLEMENT LIALINE.

*Una Madonna Motto Antica* by Pico Cellini. (Reprinted from 'Proporzioni', 1950. No. 3. Sansoni. Florence. 200 L. One colour plate; ten photographs.)

The venerated 'Madonna incoronata' at Santa Maria Nova, also called Santa Francesca Romana, in the Forum in Rome has been sent to Florence for restoration. The picture as it has appeared till now, was a thirteenth century Tuscan repainting, of rather a clumsy variety. Photographs of this picture, both with and without its jewels and crowns, appear in this brochure. The repainting has been carefully removed and the fifth century original revealed. It is much damaged except for our Lady's head, which is of haunting beauty and delicacy of colour and poise. It is somewhat reminiscent at the technique of the late Alexandrine portraits on the Mummy Cases. Such work of discovery and publication goes to further the need expressed by Fr Gervase Matthew in his study of *Byzantine Painting*, though this picture anti-dates the limits (eighth—fifteenth centuries) that he sets to the Byzantine period proper.

E.J.B.F.

*Russian Non-conformity* by Serge Bolshakoff, D.PHIL. (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, U.S.A.) \$3.

A 'popular' book on Russian religious non-conformity was a bold and worth-while undertaking, and Dr Bolshakoff is to be congratulated both on his enterprise and his performance. Its scope is thorough, and includes all manifestations of dissent from the Church of Moscow, from the Strignoliks and the Judaizers to the opponents of the revived patriarchate, from the Catholics of both rites to the Protestant sects. We wish, however, that the thoroughness had been carried one step further—to the provision of an index.

The subject is one of great variety and not a little complication, involving indeed the history of Christianity in Russia from the fourteenth century on. Obviously Dr Bolshakoff had to simplify, both through considerations of space and of the readers for whom the book is intended: but from time to time he has over-simplified, in the sense that he appears *simpliste* and does not warn his readers that 'this is not the whole story'. No attempt can here be made to discuss the contents of the book from the historical, ecclesiastical and religious points of view; it must suffice to say that it is a most useful work and valuable for the cor-

rection of certain ideas about Russian Christianity, and it contains many out-of-the-way and welcome points of information.

To-day, writes Dr Bolshakoff, the Russian Orthodox Church itself is 'the largest body of the non-conformists in the Soviet Union, the most exposed and in the most delicate position'. 'So long as the aims of the Government and the Church do not clash, mutual understanding and co-operation can last. The time will come, however, when the gospel of Christ and the gospel of Marx will prescribe mutually opposed obligation, and that will be the time of testing. Either the Soviet Orthodox prelates must *de facto* give up their Christianity or break with the state and return to the previous period of fierce persecution.' But Dr Bolshakoff expresses a faith and confidence that put some of us in the West to shame, with our talk that too often sounds as if a communist triumph would be in effect 'an end of Christianity'. 'Christianity', he says, 'has survived Islam, the great Bogomil heresy, the storm and stress giving rise to the Renaissance and Reformation, the eighteenth century Enlightenment and the French Revolution, as well as the radicalism and agnosticism of the nineteenth century. It will survive the communist era as well.'

X.Y.Z.

*The Eastern Orthodox Church* by Rev. R. M. French. Pp. 178 (Hutchinson's University Library, 1951) 7s. 6d.

So many books, good, bad, and indifferent have appeared on this subject that we should be justified in wondering whether any more need be written. Yet here we have a sympathetic but objective account of Orthodox history up to the present day, which, although written by a non-Orthodox, deserves to rank with the lesser works of an Arseniev or a Bulgakov. The Catholic will find little cause for dismay where Catholicism is mentioned, because the author is singularly free from polemical intent, and seems concerned to be fair and to present characters and circumstances in a good light. How few theologians and how few historians there are who do not indulge in detraction and downright slander! The author's sources as given in text and footnote are authorities whose names are familiar, Dvornik, Gorodetzky, Baynes and Moss, and so on. The chapters on Orthodox Worship, Monasticism, and Icons, are attractively formed.

But in the last named chapter there is just one sentence apt to raise eyebrows. 'The Orthodox interpretation', it runs, '... is that at the intercession of the saint depicted on the icon, God grants the request of the petitioner who prayed before it.' That, so far, is good. But there follows: 'In the popular mind such an explanation may readily slide into the conception that the saint is the benefactor because this particular picture of him was venerated'. Why not?

R.G.R.

*De Heilige Liturgie van onze heilige Vaer Joannes Chrysostomus.*  
3rd edition 1950, pp. xxxi, 59 (Iconographie Paters Benedictijnen, Chevetogne) n.p.

*De Goddelijke Liturgie van de Heilige Joannes Chrysostomus* (1950).  
Full version pp. 64, 12 frs (Belg.). Abbreviated version pp. 32, 6 frs (Belg.). Vita et Pax bureau, Prins Albertlei 16, Antwerp.

The third edition of Dom Irenaeus Doens' Dutch translation of the Byzantine liturgy is a considerable revision of the first. The long introduction has been extended and many footnotes explain the texts and the rubrics. The version is very complete, indeed so complete as to make the text difficult for those not accustomed to the rite, to follow, and to tend to blur the view of the general structure of the liturgy. Those who are more familiar with the Byzantine liturgy will nevertheless be able to use it with profit.

The other translations have been made by Vita et Pax and are intended specially for use in introducing the Byzantine liturgy to Western congregations and in particular are very practical when the congregation dialogues the liturgy with the priest. To assist in this all sections of the liturgy are numbered and the same numeration has been employed in both the full and abbreviated versions which can therefore be used together.

The abbreviated version contains only those parts of the liturgy which are sung. The full version is arranged with, on the right-hand page all that is sung or said aloud by priest, deacon, choir or faithful and on the left the secret prayers.

The omission of the secret prayers of the prothesis and some secret dialogues between priest and deacon which are not said in the absence of a deacon does not affect the utility of the book. The pages are excellently set and the book is of convenient dimensions. The translation is accurate and yet

reasonable and we think the best now existing in Dutch. We would welcome a similar edition in other languages.

D.P.M.

*Archimandrite Spiridon. Mes missions en Sibirie, Souvenirs d'un Moine Orthodoxe Russe.* Introduction et traduction de Pierre Pascal. Pp. 156 (Les editions du Cerf, Russie et Chretienté, Paris, 1950).

This book has a double attraction: it gives a colourful description of the author's childhood as a peasant boy born in 1875 and throws a vivid light upon the little known work of a missionary in Siberia, somewhere between 1896 and 1906.

The work was originally written down from Spiridon's own words by a friend of his who had published it in the Russian review, *Christianskoe Chtenie*, in Kiev, 1917. The authenticity of the narrative remains thus an open problem. There is, however, no reason of suspecting it, though it may well have happened that the transcriber had somewhat overemphasized the 'god-bearing soul' of the Russian peasant: in fact he draws himself the reader's attention to Dostoevsky's treatment of the theme of sin and repentance in his *House of the Dead*.

The work falls into two parts: Spiridon's early years and his active manhood. With moving sincerity he tells us of his ecstatic love of nature, of his religious and even mystical life, of the influence upon him of an old peasant with whom he sets off eventually on a pilgrimage across Russia. This is a contemplative period, and the two pilgrims retire from people to pray in the solitude of the woods. Spiridon finally reaches Greece and Mount Athos. Lack of charity among the ecclesiastics pains him deeply. His own inward experiences reminds the reader of the well-known *Way of a Pilgrim*. As the story is told without much detail and no dates, one is somewhat confused by finding him soon a member of the Mission to Siberia and mentioning his wish to get married. It is obvious that at this stage he was not a proper novice but lived, as was the custom, in or near some community without having entered upon any definite engagements, still less any vows.

He begins now the work of evangelization. The life in the Mission is described with equal sincerity and some criticisms which add to the documentary value of the book.

Spiridon soon becomes chaplain to the prisons, and is brought in contact with the crudities and tragedies of the criminal world which he relates with realism and objectivity. He succeeds in making real to many the sense of repentance and forgiveness.

The book is fascinating. It breathes the love of God and man and is penetrated by the simple poetry beautifully conveyed through the French translation by Professor Pierre Pascal, to whom belongs also the merit of having discovered this work in a Russian review, in 1917.

N. GORODETZKY.

*Red Sky at Night* by Ronald Matthews. Pp. 219 (Hollis and Carter) 9s. 6d.

This is fiction, but fiction built on facts; it is the dreaming true much of what can be found in *Through God's Underground* and the writings and yearnings of Vladimir Solovyov. It is a book that should be read by all to-day; it is full of hope because it assesses the material and the spiritual at their proper value.

K.F.E.W.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

The Epworth Press : *Concerning the Holy Spirit*, St Athanasius.  
A. and C. Black : *Revelation and the Modern World*, L. S. Thornton.

Dent and Sons : *The Life of Baron von Hügel*, M. de la Bedoyère.  
The Newman Press (U.S.A.) : *Against Academics*, St Augustine.

Grailville, Ohio : *Through Eastern Eyes*, H. van Straelen.  
Les Edition Du Cerf : *Sur l'incompréhensible De Dieu*, S. Jean Chrysostome, *Bible et Liturgie*, Jean Daniélou.

Publicaciones del Instituto Español de Estudios Eclesiasticos :  
*La Santa Misa en la Espiritualidad de S. Ignacio de Loyola*,  
Dr A. S. Goicoechea.

Cambridge University Press : *Why need we study the Slavs?*  
E. Hill.

Macmillan, New York : *Father Paul of Graymoor*, D. Gannon,  
S.A.

## REVIEWS

*The Irish Theological Quarterly* : St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

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